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# Al-Ahram

Weekly



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## De Charette tours region

FRENCH Foreign Minister Herve de Charette was due in Cairo Wednesday night for talks with President Hosni Mubarak on efforts to revive the stalled Middle East peace process. This visit will be the last leg of de Charette's tour of the region, which included stops in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Gaza and Israel. During his talks with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on Tuesday, the Associated Press reported that de Charette said that Israel should honour its pledge to withdraw from Hebron, and added that France's policy on dealing with Orient House, the PLO's headquarters in East Jerusalem, has not changed. De Charette decided at the last minute to meet with Arafat at the French Consulate, but the minister sent his aides and advisors to Orient House for other talks.

While in Israel, de Charette held talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister David Levy.

## Bibi gesture

IN WHAT was viewed as a friendly gesture towards Egypt, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu attended a reception given by Mohamed Bassiomi, the Egyptian ambassador to Israel, on Tuesday night to commemorate the 44th anniversary of the Egyptian revolution.

Israel Radio broadcast remarks made by Netanyahu at the reception praising Egypt's role in the Middle East peace process. Former Premier Shimon Peres was among some 5,000 persons, mostly Israelis and Palestinians, who attended the reception.

## Bill blasted

JAPANESE and European Union (EU) officials said a US bill to punish foreign companies that invest in Libya and Iran could threaten global trade since extraterritorial legislation was not acceptable under international law.

The US House of Representatives approved and sent to the White House on Tuesday a bill to tighten sanctions against Iran and Libya, which Washington says are sponsors of terrorism. The bill, which had been passed by the Senate, would punish foreign firms that invest in oil and gas projects, in the two states, in future. The White House said it was studying the bill to decide whether President Clinton should sign it.

## Rowing hope

EGYPTIAN rower Ali Ibrahim has made it to the semifinals of the skiff — single oarsman — competition in the Atlanta Olympics. He entered the preliminary heats as one of 20 oarsmen on Sunday and came third in his group. The first-placed rowers in each group automatically qualified for the semifinals. Ibrahim came second in his group and enters today's semifinals with the other first- and second-placed rowers from the second round. If Ibrahim takes one of the top three places in his group he will be in with a chance of a medal in Saturday's finals. The 20-year-old Egyptian started rowing four years ago. (see p. 13)

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# Peace mission

President Hosni Mubarak is going to Washington this weekend primarily to seek an effective US commitment to reactivating the peace process. He is undertaking the mission on behalf of all Arabs. Nevine Khalil reports

Capping several weeks of intensive efforts to prepare the ground for a resumption of the stalled Middle East peace process, President Hosni Mubarak travels to the United States this weekend for crucial talks with President Bill Clinton.

"The Middle East today faces a difficult crossroads," Mubarak said in a speech marking the 44th anniversary of the Egyptian revolution. He spoke with an eye on his upcoming visit to the United States, generally acknowledged as a catalyst and the prime mover behind Arab-Israeli peace talks.

It will be the fourth meeting between Mubarak and Clinton since the American leader took office nearly four years ago.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, speaking to reporters on the eve of his departure for Washington to prepare for Mubarak's visit, left no doubt about the major aim of the president's talks with Clinton.

Citing the close relations Washington has with both Arabs and Israelis, Moussa said: "The American role is needed today more than ever before." He said that Mubarak will be speaking in his capacity not only as president of Egypt but also as chairman of the Arab summit held in Cairo last month.

Moussa said he expected differences of opinion to arise with the American side during the talks. "We are not talking about carbon copy [views]," he said, but this did not mean that agreement could not be reached. In reply to a question by *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Moussa said: "Preoccupation with the presidential elections should not obstruct the American role now. A country like the United States has to act regardless of elections. The world cannot wait, and peace cannot wait too."

In addition to the peace process, Mubarak's talks with Clinton, cabinet ministers and members of the two houses of the US Congress will cover other Middle East problems, bilateral relations, notably Egypt's economic reform programme and US cooperation in this regard as well as the Middle East and North Africa economic summit to be held in Cairo next November.

Mubarak is also expected to join US Vice-President Al Gore in presiding over a meeting of the joint Presidential Council, an advisory body of Egyptian and American officials and businessmen working within the framework of the US-Egyptian Partnership Agreement.

The Middle East peace process had in recent months all but ground to a halt following a series of blows that included the Hamas/Jihad bombings in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, the punitive closure of the West Bank and Gaza, the Israeli onslaught on Lebanon and the Qana massacre, all of which climaxed in the June election of Likud's Netanyahu, an extreme right-winger, as Israeli prime minister.

The situation was aggravated by a series of statements Netanyahu made in Israel and during a US visit reflecting an intransigent position that appeared to challenge the terms of reference for Middle East peace talks

laid down at the Madrid peace conference.

Mubarak acted quickly. He convened the Cairo Arab Summit to secure a unified Arab position, to affirm the Arabs' commitment to peace and to warn Israel of the possible consequences of any reneging on the Madrid commitments. Mubarak also had bilateral talks with various Arab leaders and rounded out his consultations with a meeting on 18 July in Cairo with Netanyahu.

Mubarak commented on his talks with Netanyahu in an interview with *The Washington Post* published on Tuesday. Mubarak said: "I told him 'Look, if you are going to look for security first, you will get nowhere and terrorism will continue'. I had the impression he understood that."

In the light of the talks with Netanyahu, Mubarak said he expected progress in the Middle East peace process by the end of this year. He also told the newspaper he had assured Netanyahu that Egypt would help him but only if he helped by taking concrete and tangible steps towards a settlement.

The president said that when he met with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat last Saturday he found him sceptical about his ability to deal with Netanyahu. Mubarak added that he was able to dispel some of Arafat's doubts but the Palestinians need to see "something tangible on the ground".

"The most important result of Netanyahu's visit was his declared commitment to the Madrid conference framework and its basic principles," Moussa said in his remarks on the eve of his Washington trip. "If this [commitment] is coupled with the political will to move forward in accordance with the agreed principles in the framework of the peace process, one can assume that there will be progress."

US officials are on record as supporting the land-for-peace formula, favouring the inclusion of East Jerusalem in final-status negotiations and acknowledging that Israeli settlements in occupied Arab territories are an obstacle to peace. Mubarak is expected to capitalise on this declared American position to urge Clinton to use US influence to get Israel to go along.

Ossama El-Baz, Mubarak's chief political advisor, said he did not expect an outright reversal of the Israeli position, but he noted that, during his talks in Cairo, "Netanyahu put the equation of peace and security in its right perspective and his view on this issue became very close to ours." He explained that Netanyahu "understands very well that peace leads to security, but he also said that for peace to be achieved it needs security."

This echoed Mubarak's disclosure in his revolution anniversary speech that his talks with the Israeli prime minister showed that Netanyahu "understood the necessity of dealing with the Arab side as an equal partner whose interests should be served on an equal footing with Israel's interests... and that the importance of security lies in its being ensured for all sides."



photo: Hassan Diab

"IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE. The Suez Canal Company shall be nationalised". The historic words were uttered in Manshiya Square in Alexandria 40 years ago.

Few other events in the 44 years since the July Revolution have so

fired the imagination of the nation, or filled it with a similar sense of national pride. And few events have had such far reaching consequences.

The nationalisation of the Suez Canal sounded the death-knell of the British empire, indeed of the old co-

lonial system as a whole. In the photo above, Nasser, having delivered his history-making speech, is thronged by crowds as he rides the presidential train back to Cairo.

(see special 4-page supplement, centrefold)

## PNA cautiously optimistic

Palestinians reacted cautiously to the first high-level Palestinian-Israeli contact under Netanyahu. Most feel it's too early to judge, writes Tarek Hassan from Gaza

As Palestinian President Yasser Arafat met with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy in Gaza this Tuesday, the relief of the 10,000 Palestinian workers allowed into Israel after receiving work permits was offset by the disillusionment of around 50,000 others who are still waiting in a state of limbo.

Many Palestinian politicians did not lend much weight to the first high-level exchange since right-winger Benjamin Netanyahu won the 29 May Israeli elections. For them, it is too soon to judge whether Netanyahu's government has taken the first step towards improving relations with the Palestinians and fulfilling their national aspirations.

In the words of Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Nabil Shaath, "The measures concerning the Palestinian workers are limited so far. They are in line with the Likud ideology. They are not a breakthrough in the negotiation process between the Palestinians and Israel. Unlike Labour, Likud is not in favour of separating the Palestinian territories from Israel."

Said Al-Mudalal, the Palestinian National Authority's official responsible for labour affairs, said that "Israel issues permits to married Palestinians over 30. Around 30,000 workers fulfil these conditions, while the chances are limited for the other Palestinian workers who find work in the West Bank and Gaza."

Palestinian decision-makers are in agreement that Likud is exploiting the workers' card to cover the lack of progress on the political front.

Al-Tayeb Abdel-Rahim, secretary-general of the Palestinian Presidency, believes that Israel is continuing to obstruct the growth of an independent Palestinian economy, thus adversely affecting Palestinian trade relations with other countries.

Although the Arafat-Levy meeting, which took place amid tight Palestinian security, did not produce any concrete results, some Palestinians expressed their satisfaction that a meeting of this nature had taken place. Netanyahu's headline Likud Party had for years demonised Arafat

as a murderer and denounced those holding talks with him, including former Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

In a press conference following the meeting, Arafat told reporters: "We decided to formalise our relations and to create the proper frameworks for examining the issues and advancing them... We have agreed that these contacts will continue at all levels." A PLO official remarked on the "immediate chemistry" between Arafat and Levy.

Abdel-Rahim said that the meeting indicated "Israel's recognition of the PNA and that the right-wing Israeli government has no alternative but to recognise and negotiate with the Authority."

Reuters quoted Israel's leading peace movement, Peace Now, as saying that the meeting was "an important step for peace and security — a step that erased tens of years of Likud Party disregard for the Palestinian people, its representatives and legitimate rights."

PNA Local Government Minister Saeb Erekat, who accompanied Arafat, was quoted by news agencies as saying that "the meeting was a serious attempt to put the peace process back on track." Erekat said progress had been made on a number of issues, among them a long-delayed Israeli troop withdrawal from part of the West Bank town of Hebron, freeing a Palestinian woman prisoner, and the imminent resumption of talks of a crucial overall Israeli-PLO steering committee that last met five months ago.

While certain Palestinian elements regard the Arafat-Levy contact as an exploratory meeting that will pave the way for further talks, Nabil Abu Redinah, Arafat's political advisor, cautioned against undue optimism. "We would like this meeting to be followed by a Arafat-Netanyahu meeting," he said.

Palestinian sources revealed that Arafat had urged the Israeli government to fulfil its promises during Tuesday's 90-minute exchange. Chief among these are commencing work on a safe passage to allow Palestinians in and out of the West Bank and Gaza, releasing Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons and further easing the closures in the self-rule areas. It is re-

ported that Arafat also expressed his hope that Israel would carry out the remaining elements of the autonomy agreement, including partial withdrawal from Hebron and the resumption of final status talks.

The Israelis, on the other hand, took care to remind Arafat that, having been in power for only a month and a half, the new government was still studying the situation regarding relations with the PNA. The government believes that it has inherited a security problem from the former Labour-led government, and must first find a solution to this problem. If such a problem had not already existed, questioned one Israeli official, why did Peres' government halt its redeployment process in Hebron?

Press reports noted that the issue of Jerusalem was conspicuously absent in the Arafat-Levy meeting. PLO officials were quoted by agencies as saying that Levy had refrained from direct references to PLO activities in the city, and Arafat avoided calling for an end to Jewish settlements in the area.

All in all, the Arafat-Levy meeting came too early to inspire much confidence in Netanyahu's government among Palestinians. The overriding Palestinian sentiment at the moment is that the outstanding issues will be cautiously and slowly addressed by Netanyahu's government.

Agencies reported that Levy asked Arafat to take a message to Syria saying he is ready to hold top-level talks, in the first overture of this nature to Syria by the new right-wing government. According to an Israeli official quoted in the *Jerusalem Post*, Levy told Arafat: "Tell the Syrian foreign minister that his country's conduct up till now has not advanced peace... So perhaps the [Syrians] should do something and go for open dialogue. I am willing to meet him anywhere and anytime."

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# Battle at the Bar

The Bar Association continues to face problems with judicial sequestration as one of its custodians decides to resign following alleged transgressions by his counterparts. Amira Howeldy investigates

Prominent Islamist lawyer Mohamed Selim El-Awwa, one of the three custodians responsible for administering judicial sequestration at the Bar Association, dropped a bombshell last week when he asked to resign from his custodial duties. Acceptance of his resignation is conditional on the court's acceptance of his lawsuit alleging malpractice on the part of the other two custodians as his reason for wishing to relinquish his post.

El-Awwa's action comes in the wake of a series of lawsuits and counter lawsuits filed by representatives of the association's strong opposing groups of leftists and Islamists, who are battling for control of the association.

In his plea to the court, El-Awwa accused the other two custodians, Ahmed El-Khawaga, the association's chairman for the past 30 years and Mohamed El-Mahdi, chairman of the syndicate's Giza branch, of "violating the court's ruling of judicial sequestration on the main syndicate by extending their authority to the branch syndicates", and of signing blank sheets of paper for the lawyers who want to be appointed custodians at the branch syndicates, thus giving them carte blanche to run the branches as they please. The case will be heard on 11 August.

The Bar Association — dominated for the past four years by the Muslim Brotherhood — was put under judicial sequestration last April by the Abdin Court of First Instance in response to a lawsuit filed by 14 lawyers who alleged financial irregularities by the association's Islamist-controlled council. The court cited a report by the Central Auditing Agency showing that large sums of Bar Association money had been misused and that the association's own auditing body had not applied relevant financial regulations. No record had been kept of money allocated to pilgrimages, and the syndicate's final budgets for the years 1989 to 1995 had not been submitted to the agency.

According to El-Awwa, the court's verdict "forced judicial sequestration on the main syndicate only and did not mention the branch syndicates at all". However, he claims that El-Khawaga and El-Mahdi "managed to wrest a ministerial decree from the minister of justice's assistant forcing judicial sequestration on the branch syndicates". Such a move, he added, was illegal "because the ministry is an administrative, rather than judicial authority, and therefore cannot issue such decisions".

Meanwhile, representatives of the local Cairo, Alexandria and Al-Arish chapters of the association have filed lawsuits contesting the sequestration.

Despite being a custodian for the past three months, El-Awwa said that he only discovered the "illegal violations" last week, when he saw El-Khawaga sign a blank sheet of paper and give it to some lawyers. El-Awwa maintains that the actions of El-Khawaga and El-Mahdi are aimed at increasing the influence of anti-Islamists like themselves within the syndicate.

The 1992 Bar Association elections, which resulted in an overwhelming victory for the Muslim Brotherhood, who won nine out of the council's 24 seats, caused widespread controversy within the association, known as the "castle of freedom".

Since then, accusations and counter accusations have dominated most of the association's activities, especially where the Islamists are concerned. It was said that the court's decision to appoint El-Awwa as a custodian was made with the aim of placing the Islamist faction. Nevertheless, a week later the decision was contested by dozens of Islamist lawyers, temporarily suspending its implementation.

El-Khawaga has denied all of El-Awwa's allegations, describing them as "pure misunderstandings". He told *Al-Ahram Weekly*: "I did not wrest a ministerial decree to put the branch syndicates under sequestration. In fact, it was the lawyers who had called for the sequestration who resorted to the Ministry of Justice to send a bailiff to implement sequestration on the branch syndicates. I had nothing to do with it." As for the blank sheets, El-Khawaga said that he had merely been "too busy" and, therefore, was saving time by signing blank sheets before anything had been written on them.

El-Khawaga argued that El-Awwa was aware of all the actions taken by the custodians "as he himself signed 90 per cent of the papers and cheques".

El-Awwa, however, insists that he, and the Bar Association's 186,000 lawyers, were "deceived". According to Article 144 of the Bar Association code, said El-Awwa, the syndicate chapters are totally independent of the main syndicate and are not affiliated to it administratively. "Therefore forcing sequestration on the branch syndicates is illegal and so is El-Khawaga's decision to freeze all their bank assets."

As the legal battle continues, observers believe that El-Awwa's stand will inevitably strengthen the Islamist trend in the syndicate. El-Awwa, on the other hand, maintains that he had "no such thing in mind" when he decided to resign. Rather it was the other camp which was "manoeuvring" to increase its influence and win more support for anti-Islamist in the Bar Association elections, scheduled for 30 September.



PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak delivered a speech on the occasion of the 44th anniversary of the 23rd of July Revolution. In his speech, Mubarak said "the great Egyptian Revolution" had changed the face of life in Egypt and the Arab World, and led to radical changes in the history of the region. He stressed that our vocation as Arabs is to strengthen our unity to gain just and comprehensive peace in the region.

## The Arabs are back

This year is seeing a booming summer season for Arab tourists, which is good news for the tourist industry after last year's decline, writes Rehab Saad

Hotellers say that the number of tourists from Gulf Arab countries visiting Cairo this year has increased by 70 per cent over last year's figures. Cairo airport officials put the increase at a more modest 20 per cent, but their figures were confined to that entry point only. The increase is good news for the tourist industry and the Egyptian economy in general.

Last year the number of Arab visitors dropped dramatically, by between 30 to 70 per cent, according to various estimates, as a result of the vitriolic war of words between the Egyptian press, on one hand, and the Saudi and Kuwaiti press, on the other. The Egyptian media campaign followed the flogging of an Egyptian doctor in Saudi Arabia who had alleged that a Saudi headmaster had sexually abused his son, and the sentence of imprisonment passed in absentia in Cairo against a Kuwaiti newspaper editor.

But last year's furore has died down, and, according to Maj. Gen. Mohamed Ta'lab, head of security at Cairo airport, "The number of Arab tourists this year constitutes 40 per cent of the total tourist movement to Egypt. In the first 15 days of July, Cairo airport received 40,000 Arabs, 15,000 of them Saudis."

Egypt would always have a special place in Arab hearts, he assured, and "political events are soon forgotten".

Officials agree that the Arab summit held in Cairo last month was good promotion for Egypt as an Arab tourist destination. "This summit had a big influence on restoring the Arab market," commented Maj. Gen. Said Kamel, head of the Passports Department at Cairo airport. "We are expecting more Arab tourists this year, especially now that conflicts between different countries have been discussed and are on their way to being settled. This atmosphere of reconciliation encourages tourism," said Adel Abdel-Aziz, head of the Egyptian Tourist Authority.

According to the statistics issued by the Ministry of Tourism, there were 10,373 Saudi tourists in Egypt in June this year, compared to 8,984 in June of last year. There were also more tourists from Arab countries outside the Gulf region. There were 1,199 Moroccans compared to 1,130 the year before, 4,428 Jordanians compared to 4,391 and 1,553 Lebanese compared to 1,372.

The number of nights spent in Egypt by Arab tourists over the same period also increased: by 14.83 per cent in the case of the Bahraini market (6,518 nights compared to 5,676 last year); Qataris spent 5,728 nights compared to 5,682 last year; and citizens of the United Arab Emirates spent 11,788 nights compared to 10,144.

This upsurge in business is keenly felt in Cairo's big hotels. "All the indications this year prove that we're having a good season. We knew from our marketing trips and trade shows that this would be a better season than last year," said Nabila Samak, head of public relations at Semiramis Intercontinental. The hotel, she added, is fully able to cater for the Arab market, with singers, nightclubs and restaurants to entertain guests.

"We've got a full house," declared Nesrine Sadeq, public relations manager of the Cairo Sheraton. "Six hundred and sixty rooms and 113 suites are occupied, and there are people waiting for rooms to become available." In fact, she added, more accommodation was needed in Cairo, because "there aren't enough rooms".

The Atlas Zamalek Hotel also reported an influx of Arab guests. "Saudis top our list of visitors, followed by Kuwaitis, Bahrainis, Qataris and other Arab nationalities," reported Maher Kamel, the hotel's sales manager.

Those involved in the tourist industry maintain that the notion that Egypt is a natural holiday destination for Arabs, and does not require any promotion, is outdated. "These days there is strong competition between different destinations to attract the Arab market," said one tourist official, who asked that his name be withheld.

Consequently, the Ministry of Tourism has launched a million dollar advertising campaign which began last year and is continuing this summer. "The TV campaign targets Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and United Arab Emirates. The advertisements concentrate on what attracts the Arab tourist — things like Nile cruises, theatres and cinemas," explained ETA head Abdel-Aziz.

According to Abdel-Aziz, Arab tourists are also attracted by events like the International Arab Song Festival, to be held at the end of this month. "We are inviting a large number of Arab television companies to cover this event, and of course it's all good promotion for Egypt," he said.

Facilitating travel into the country is another aspect of promoting Egypt to Arab tourists. Here, too, the tourist industry has taken steps. "A number of charter flights are now operating from the Arab countries directly to the tourist resorts," said Abdel-Aziz. "We have a direct line from Kuwait to Hurgada, and from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to Luxor, as well as a number of flights from Arab countries to Alexandria."

And, according to Kamel, the absence of stringent visa requirements contributes to making travel from the Arab states easy, and, therefore, attractive. "Entry visas are not required for some nationalities and for others we are able to give six-month visas on the spot at the airport. This also applies to servants travelling with the groups."

## Government ban on FGM

The Ministry of Health issued a decree banning the practice of female genital mutilation in and out of all hospitals. Dina Ezzat reports

Last week, Sara, an 11-year-old girl, bled to death in a Cairo hospital after a botched female genital mutilation (FGM) operation was performed on her by a village barber.

Police are investigating the incident and the barber is likely to face criminal charges for inflicting physical harm on the girl.

A few days later, the Minister of Health and Family Planning, Dr Ismail Sallam, issued a decree banning FGM in all hospitals. The decree also specified that midwives, doctors and nurses registered with the Ministry of Health must stop the ritual or face criminal charges.

Sallam stated that the decision puts an end to the psychological and physical harm that young girls are forced to endure as a result of the ritual. A common belief in Egyptian society is that FGM checks a woman's sexuality and thus prevents pre-marital sex and promiscuity.

Although many Muslim and Christian clergymen would say that neither religion condones the ritual, others believe it is obligatory and encourage thousands of families to subject their girls to the practice.

The late Grand Imam Gad El-Haq Ali Gad El-Haq — who passed away earlier this year — publicly supported the practice and suggested that Muslims rejecting it should be punished.

To counter this trend, Sallam requested the cooperation of clergymen, including the current Grand Imam of Al-Azhar mosque, Sayed Tan-

tawi. Tantawi had declared that there is no definite evidence that the practice is ordained by Islam.

"The decree has been enforced from the day it was made public," said Dr Mushira El-Shafie'i, director of the Reproductive Health Department at the Ministry of Health and Family Planning.

"We are not going to compromise. This operation has serious consequences and we are not going to allow members of the medical profession to practise it," she added.

According to El-Shafie'i, ministry officials "will make sure that the law is properly enforced". She explained, "they are going to visit the different hospitals and clinics to make sure that no doctors are violating the ministerial decree".

El-Shafie'i denied that the decision was solely prompted by Sara's death and affirmed that it is based on an elaborate study which examined medical, religious and sociological perspectives.

According to a recent report from the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights, FGM — which usually involves clipping the clitoris, but on rare occasions can include the removal of all the outer sexual organs — is performed daily on about 3,600 girls between the ages of eight and 14. Some of these girls meet the same sad fate as Sara. In February of last year, Amira, a 14-year-old school girl living in the small village of Kafir Al-Tawila in the province of Daqhlia, died af-

ter a licensed pediatrician sliced off her clitoris. Others have to live with chronic health or psychological problems.

In April, a barber in a village near Assiut in southern Egypt was sentenced to a year in prison for causing serious and permanent damage to a 9-year-old girl during a female genital mutilation operation.

The government previously tried to ban the tradition but failed.

In September 1994, former Minister of Family Planning and Welfare Dr Maher Mahran, drafted a bill to prohibit the practice, which he described as "a butchery that damages the health and lives of more than half of all young girls".

Mahran's comment was made as international attention focused on the issue following a Cable News Network (CNN) investigative report which showed a nine-year-old girl fighting the cutting tools of a barber in one of Cairo's poorer neighbourhoods. The report was broadcast during the 1994 UN International Conference on Population and Family Planning in Cairo.

However, Mahran's bill never left his desk. And in November of the same year, former Minister of Health Dr Ali Abdel-Fattah, broke a 50-year-long ban by re-introducing the ritual to the ministry's public hospitals and clinics. Abdel-Fattah's rationale was that banning the operation in hospitals encouraged families to take their daughters to barbers and untrained nurses, thus

increasing the health hazards of the operation.

But non-governmental organisations (NGOs) rejected the move as "a promotion of the harmful ritual". The Female Genital Mutilation Combat Task Force sought the assistance of both local and international organisations, ultimately persuading Abdel-Fattah to abrogate his decree in January of this year.

But this did not stop business from going on as usual.

Women's rights activists are concerned that while the recent ministerial decree officially and publicly denounces the practice, they believe that since it does not carry the weight of a law, it still leaves room for FGM to thrive underground.

Many believe that a law against FGM is still a remote and elusive possibility. According to Amina El-Gundi, secretary-general of the National Council for Motherhood and Childhood, attempts to incorporate an article banning the practice in the recently passed comprehensive child code were aborted because most parliamentarians disapproved of the move.

Awareness remains the key factor in the fight against the ritual. The FGM Combat Task Force is focusing on enhancing health and religious awareness to stop parents from forcing their girls to be mutilated. But as members of the NGO admit, it will be years before the country sees the last case of FGM.

## Arab front to fight normalisation

Three pan-Arab professional unions are calling for a wide Arab front to stop all forms of normalisation of ties with Israel. Rana Allam reports

Arab activists are planning to set up a group to oppose normalisation between the Arab world and Israel. Inspired by June's Arab summit, Farouq Abu Eassa, secretary-general of the Arab Lawyers' Union, issued a call to all Arab civil institutions and unions. Regional and international developments, he said, had made it necessary for Arab non-governmental bodies to unite to deal with the challenges and dangers they face.

Of these, the growth of foreign intervention in the region and the Israeli-American strategic alliance were the most serious, he said. In view of the declining status of the Arab world and its lack of unity, it was necessary to move quickly to take advantage of the reconciliatory atmosphere prevailing in the wake of the summit.

It was made clear during the summit that Arab states would reconsider the steps that had been taken towards normalisation if Israel reneged on its commitments.

The Arab Lawyers' Union is joined by the Arab Artists Union and the Arab Journalists' Union in their call for an anti-normalisation movement. "In conjunction with last June's summit, we are preparing to hold a conference next November in Cairo," confirmed Saadeddin Wahba, chairman of the Arab Artists' Union and a prominent writer. The anti-normalisation front, he added, would back up the summit's decisions.

As Artists' Union chairman, Wahba had earlier issued a decision banning the normalising of relations with Israel in the field of the arts. He was backed by 13 Arab states. In his view, Israel has merely been "fooling around with peace", and matters are now deteriorating.

Saadeddin Hafez, secretary-general of the Arab Journalists' Union and a senior political analyst, said that closer Arab relations with Israel were "harmful to Arab interests". Even if governments were obliged to enter negotiations and sign official agreements with Israel, this should not be a signal for the peoples of those countries to rush into normalisation, he added.

Egypt was the first Arab country to sign a peace treaty with Israel, in 1979. But relations have never really thawed to anything more than a "cold peace". Five years after the Camp David treaty was signed, former Israeli Prime Min-

ister Yitzhak Shamir said that Israel had paid a high price for peace and was "waiting for the Egyptian people to give us real peace". Provisions for normalisation, considered by the Israelis as one of the most important aspects of the peace treaty, were never really applied. In 1989, Shamir remarked that "peace and normalisation stay on paper, and the Israeli Embassy [in Egypt] remains isolated".

According to Mohamed Payek, secretary-general of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights, the election of Bin-yamin Netanyahu has left Israel with a government even keener to achieve normalisation without making any real concessions towards peace.

Those concerned with establishing the anti-normalisation front believe that it is now vital to form an Arab public opinion that opposes normalisation without the full return of Arab rights. Wahba believes that institutions of civil society are well-placed to fulfil this role. "These non-governmental organisations and unions are more aware of the political line that the Arab people should follow," said Wahba. "These people can take action and put obstacles in the road to normalisation." Agreed Helmi Shamsawy, director of the Cairo-based Arab Research Centre and a member of the Popular Anti-Zionist Movement. Public opinion, he added, had been roused over far more minor issues. "Now it is time to take action against normalisation with the Zionist enemy. A more patriotic cause."

According to Hafez, the conference will voice opposition to normalisation plans made on an official level between Israel and Arab governments under the sponsorship of the United States. For 17 years, Hafez said, the Egyptian people have faced consecutive waves of brainwashing and publicity for Israel. But, of the Arab nations, Egypt had done the least to achieve normalisation with the Israelis, "because they [Egyptians] realised instinctively that their interests clash".

After four wars with Israel, followed by the Camp David Peace Treaty, the war for normalisation began, opposed by most Egyptians, continued Hafez. Egypt's attitude, he maintained, has encouraged other Arab nations to resist closer ties with Israel, but at this stage, "an organised Arab movement is necessary to lead the way against normalisation".

## Prisoners in the Egyptian-Israeli package

Egyptian officials have initiated efforts to pinpoint exactly the number of Egyptian citizens imprisoned in Israel, reports Dina Ezzat. But, there is more to the issue than meets the eye

Officials at the Egyptian Consulate in Israel have begun taking steps to update their information on the number of Egyptians in Israeli jails, and the charges for which they were incarcerated.

While the Israeli Embassy in Cairo pegs the number of Egyptian prisoners in Israel at about 25, this figure is yet to be verified. Ahmed Kamal, the Egyptian consul to Israel, said that "We suspect there are a few dozen, but... not more than a hundred or so". A source at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs says he is aware of only eight.

According to the source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, "These are, at least, the prisoners serving lengthy prison sentences."

"But of course, there are those who are arrested for a short period and released, or those who are arrested and immediately deported," he added.

A major impediment to Egyptian government efforts to keep track of citizens travelling to Israel, said Kamal, "is that Egyptians who go to Israel do not follow the proper procedure of registering with us [the Egyptian Consulate]. So, we never really know how many Egyptians are in Israel." Egyptian sources estimate that there are about 3,000 Egyptian workers in Israel and no more than 20,000 who visit the country each year.

Whatever the figure, the number of Egyptians incarcerated in Israeli jails seems to be on the upswing, mainly, said Kamal, as a result of an influx of Egyptian workers heading to Israel in search of job opportunities.

"Most of the prisoners are workers who entered Israel on a tourist visa and then decided to stay on and work. But when the Israeli Ministry of Labour sends inspectors to ferret

out illegal foreign labourers, they are arrested," explained Kamal.

The increase is also due to Egyptians who enter Israel without the necessary visa. While Egyptians are permitted to enter Israel without an entry visa, one must be procured should they not go elsewhere in the country. Failure to do so results in arrest.

Drug trafficking and subversion are also among charges that have been levelled against some Egyptians who wind up in Israeli jails. Those convicted of the latter crime are the minority, said Kamal, but are also the ones serving the longest prison terms.

"Among those who have been serving lengthy terms behind bars in Israel is Mohamed Soleiman Sawarka, who was charged with anti-Israeli activities and given a life sentence," stated Kamal. Sawarka's health, however, is a source of concern for Egyptian officials. Consequently, one of the aims of the survey is to determine which prisoners are in poor health and, hopefully, arrange for a prisoner exchange with Israel.

"Sawarka tops this list," said Kamal. "He's in poor health and knowing he would want to die in Egypt, we have asked the concerned Egyptian-Israeli liaison channels to look into the matter and explore the possibilities."

The issue of Egyptian prisoners in Israeli jails continues to be a minor bone of contention between Cairo and Tel Aviv. "It is not a politicised problem, as such," said Mohamed Abdel-Salam, a researcher at Al-Ahram Centre for Strategic and Political Studies. "But it is something brought up every once in a while. Both sides, however, deal with it apart from other sensitive issues such as prisoners of war."

There are a few Israeli prisoners in Egyptian jails as well. According to Lior Ben Dor,

the Israeli Embassy's press attaché in Cairo, "the number of Israeli prisoners in Egypt does not exceed four." But Egyptian sources suggest that the number is closer to a dozen.

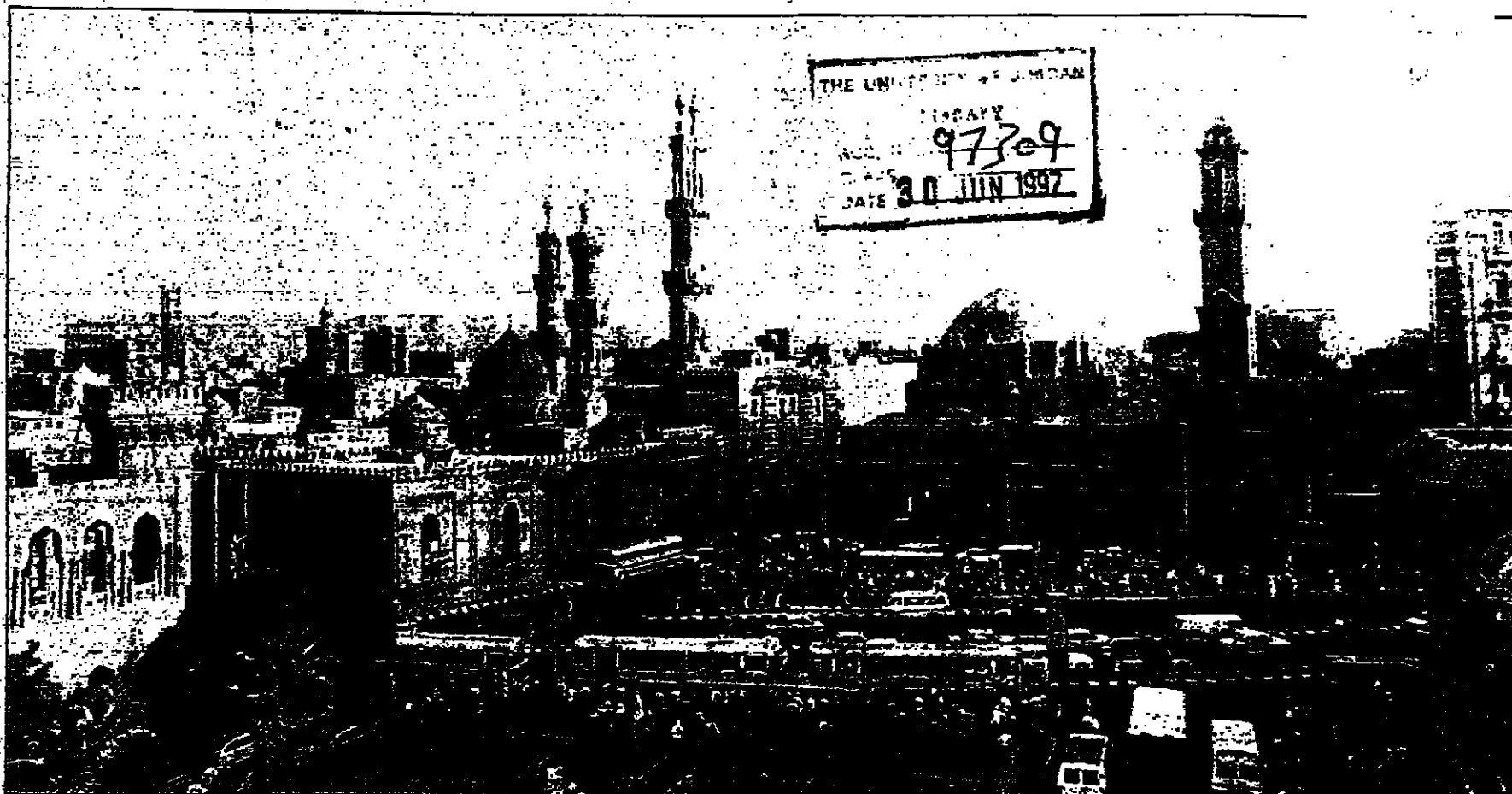
"In either case, it's not an issue of number, but of political value," said Abdel-Salam. "Most of the Israeli prisoners in Egypt are convicted of espionage-related charges and therefore are of more value to their state than any Bedouin convicted of drug-trafficking." While under Egyptian law, individuals convicted of espionage or drug trafficking may receive the death penalty, the reality is sometimes different from the legalities.

"The convicted Israeli drug trafficker Youssef Tahhan, for example, was sentenced to death years ago, but has so far not been executed by Egypt because the government likes to use him as a bargaining chip with the Israelis," stated Abdel-Salam.

Diplomatic sources suggest that the dossier of Israeli prisoners in Egypt cannot be placed on a separate table from those of other "affairs of mutual interest and concern" between Cairo and Tel Aviv. According to one source, "It is not really separate from the problem of prisoners of war or espionage cases. It is part of a larger package of mutual interests where there is a great deal of give and take."

Although Egypt was the first Arab country to make peace with Israel, relations between the two countries have been frosty since the 1979 treaty signing. The Israeli press has often described the relations between Cairo and Tel Aviv as a "cold peace". On its part, Egypt lays the blame for the frigid relations at Israel's doorstep, arguing that its occupation of Arab lands seriously undermines any efforts to thaw out existing tensions between the two states.





Fatimid landmark to regain old splendour

photo: Mohamed EL-QI

## Al-Azhar restoration launched

Major restoration is planned for Al-Azhar Mosque, the world's oldest centre for Islamic theology. Nevine El-Aref reports

Al-Azhar is a landmark of Fatimid Cairo. Built as the state's official mosque, it is also the world's oldest and most prestigious institute of Islamic studies, drawing thousands of religious scholars from all over the Islamic world. However, humidity, drainage water, natural erosion and human use have taken their toll on the foundations, walls and columns of the city's famous mosque.

A ministerial decree ordered an urban planning study, and restoration blueprints were drawn up for both Al-Azhar Mosque and the area surrounding it in 1992, according to Fawzi El-Zoghbi, administrative director of Al-Azhar. However, action on the plans was delayed until this year, when Mohamed Sayed Tantawi became grand shaykh of Al-Azhar.

When he took over the post, Tantawi invited the higher committee of the restoration project, consisting of the ministers of awqaf (Islamic endowments), culture, housing and infrastructure, the governor of Cairo and the secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) to a meeting to discuss lack of progress on the project. It was decided to change contractors and the new private company to which the project was assigned

began work immediately.

According to El-Zoghbi, the restoration scheme encompasses every part of the building, including the foundations, walls, domes, minarets, lighting system and toilets.

Egypt is financing the project jointly with three Islamic countries: Saudi Arabia is donating LE10 million, Pakistan \$100,000, and Brunei is giving over LE4 million. These funds will contribute not only to the mosque restoration project but also to providing new housing and facilities for students of the institute.

The Al-Azhar restoration is only part of a wider scheme to restore Fatimid Cairo. According to Adel El-Zoghbi, project supervisor of the body which is to tackle the larger-scale scheme, particular attention will be paid to the area surrounding Al-Azhar. At present, El-Zoghbi said, there was a lot of rubbish in the area, largely as a result of the fruit and vegetable sellers who set up stalls around the mosque. This, in El-Zoghbi's view, represents a "total disregard of the dignity and the holiness of the place".

To preserve the historic character of the area, all workshops, shops and houses adjoining the mosque will be removed, while

houses, shops, and other buildings facing the mosque will be renovated in such a way as to blend in with the architectural and historic character of the mosque. Al-Azhar's administrative offices will also be moved to the Khaledin garden located at the end of Al-Azhar Street just in front of the Dar Al-Efta building.

Al-Azhar Street itself is to be pedestrianised, with two parking areas at each end of the street. Improvements are also planned to the area's infrastructure.

Abdel-Halim Nouredin, secretary-general of the SCA, said that his body was responsible only for the technical supervision of the architectural work and the fine restoration work within the mosque. The SCA is also providing a new lighting system for the minarets and facades of the mosque, which will aim to dramatise the monument's historic and religious significance.

Al-Azhar Mosque was the second mosque to be built in Egypt, after Amr ibn Al-As Mosque. It was repaired, renovated and enlarged at various stages in its history.

The first addition was by Caliph Al-Hafiz Ijeddin Allah Al-Fatimi, who added a fourth rowaq (hostel for visiting pilgrims). The

mosque continued to be the focus of state attention as long as the Fatimids were in power, but it was neglected under the rule of the Ayyubids, who even discontinued the practice of the caliph holding Friday prayers there.

During the Mameluke era, however, the mosque regained its leading role. Sultan Qait Bey redesigned its main gate and added a minaret. Sultan Barqooq introduced further improvements, and Sultan El-Ghouri added a splendid twin-towered minaret. The Mamelukes also established two schools attached to the mosque. Emir Abdel-Rahman Katkhuda undertook a major architectural overhaul, adding another rowaq.

Modern renovation and expansion has included Rowaq El-Magharba, added by Mohamed Ali, and El-Sayed gate, renovated by Khedive Ismail. In addition Khedive Tawfiq renewed the mosque's open courtyard and Rowaq El-Sayed. Khedive Abbas Helmi established the Rowaq Al-Abbasi and restored the mosque's western facade and its Mizanin gates.

Edited by Wadie Kirolos

## The right to be elected

**Awad El-Morr**, chief justice of the Supreme Constitutional Court, in the second article of his series dealing with the Court as a guarantor of human rights, examines the Court's ruling against laws that compromised the right of citizens to stand freely in elections



Under Article 62 of the Constitution the rights of all citizens to vote, to be elected and to express their opinions in public referendums with a view to enabling them to take part in the conduct of public affairs through their freely chosen representatives are guaranteed.

It is the People's Assembly which, under the Constitution, is exclusively vested with the power to legislate in all domains. The Shura Council's competence is purely consultative, as demonstrated by Articles 194 and 195 of the Constitution.

Case no. 23, for the eighth judicial year, decided on the 15 April, 1989 was referred by the Court of Merits to the Supreme Constitutional Court, and addressed the validity of Law no. 120/1980 regarding the Shura Council.

The Court upheld the opinion that the statute was unconstitutional since it confined the right to be elected to the Shura Council to citizens affiliated with current political parties. In doing so it barred other qualified citizens from their inherent right to be freely chosen by the electorate, in violation of Article 62 of the Constitution. The insertion of this article in part three of the Constitution was viewed as conclusive evidence that the rights and duties regulated therein were intended to encompass citizens as a whole, in order to guarantee their effective participation in political life.

The exercise of the rights preserved by Article 62 of the Constitution is a national duty, and consequently should be enacted by all citizens in what is one of the most important public spheres, namely generating the representative character of the government.

By denying the right of independent candidates to be elected, therefore, the challenged statute transgressed Constitutional bounds. In addition, the statute contravened the general principle, asserted by the court, according to which restrictions on political rights which are neither mandated by the very nature of the respective right, nor by the requirement of its exercise, should not be condoned.

In response to the governments' argument that independent candidates had no place in a political system based on multi-parties, as prescribed by Article 5 of the Constitution, the Court pointed out that in principle the power to legislate remains discretionary unless restrained by the Constitution.

Furthermore, limitations made by the legislature should in no way render obsolete or impracticable the proper exercise of fundamental Constitutional rights and freedoms.

The Court concluded that Article 5 of the Constitution was never envisaged as permitting the exclusion of independent candidates from national or local councils or assemblies. Rather, it was devised to eliminate the totalitarian political regime that had crystallised under the Arab Socialist Union without infringing on rights codified by the Constitution.

The judgement of the Court applies to barring independent candidates from any other councils or assemblies of a representative nature, including the popular councils formed in accordance with Article 162 of the Constitution, and the People's Assembly whose composition is prescribed by Article 87 thereof. In all these cases, the Court enunciated the same principles, and struck down the respective statute enacted in violation thereof.

## Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

In one of his yearly reports, the British high commissioner, Lord Cromer, wrote that at the end of the 19th century, Egypt could boast 169 newspapers and magazines. This, to him, was indicative of the amount of freedom in the country two decades after the British occupation, and one of the political fruits of lifting the restrictions on journalists.

Scholars have searched diligently for the names of all these periodicals, yet what they came up with barely exceeded the fingers of both hands. The discrepancy is one of the enigmas of the history of the Egyptian press.

Most of the puzzle, however, could be solved through recourse to a rather curious section in *Al-Ahram* — the new publications announcements. It was this tradition, established early on and maintained by the newspaper, which enables us to delve into that mysterious world of the 169 publications which Cromer attributed to the last two decades of the last century.

What arises here is an extraordinary in this world is the astounding mixture of different types of newspapers. In addition to Arabic language newspapers, there were newspapers in French, Italian, Greek and German. The majority of the editors were of Syrian origin, but, by the end of the century, Egyptians began to edge their way into the world of journalism. The secular press, dominated by the most prominent secularists of the last century Shibli Shumail, appeared side-by-side on the newsstands with the religious press, led by *Al-Ahram* published by Sheikh Rashid Rida. Then, there were the newspapers of the new *effendi* (civil servant) class, of the graduates of the school of law headed by Mustafa Kamel and Ahmed Lutfi El-Sayed, of the sheikhs such as Ali Yousef owner of the illustrious *Al-Mu'ayyid*. There were very serious and weighty periodicals and others that lifted humour and parody to new heights. This is the exciting world into which we shall now embark.

The growth of the newspaper industry in Egypt was the product of several developments in the late 19th century. Most significant was the influx of large numbers of immigrants from Greater Syria. The first wave arrived in the wake of the civil war in Jabal Lubnan in the 1860s. A second wave extended from 1882 to the outbreak of World War I in 1914, bringing immigrants, not just from Lebanon, but from all parts of the Ottoman's Syrian province.

The newcomers arrived playing their various trades. Among them were journalists who had founded successful newspapers in their land of origin, but, they believed, not as successful as they would be in Egypt. The following item from *Al-Ahram*'s 13 March 1885 edition illustrates:

"The erudite men-of-letters Yacoub Sami and Faris Nimr, founders of the venerable *Al-Mu'ayyid* have resolved to establish themselves in Egypt and to publish their esteemed scientific and industrial journal, which has already achieved considerable repute among specialised and general readers."

The article goes on to describe their farewell to their friends and acquaintances in Beirut, among whom was the famous American missionary, Dr Van Dyke. It also cited the letters written by two of the most prominent political figures in Egypt at the time, Sheikh Pasha and Riyad Pasha, who testified "to the superiority and conspicuousness of the material, and abundant benefit" of *Al-Mu'ayyid*. The letters were featured on the front page of the newspaper's first edition to be published in Egypt.

Throughout the 1880s, the newspaper industry was virtually a monopoly of Egypt's growing Syrian community. They also had the lion's share of new publications, as numerous references in *Al-Ahram* confirm. Salim Paris began publication of a new, bi-weekly in November 1885, Georgi Ghaziz launched *Al-Safa* (Clarity) in April 1887. In September 1889 Khalil Zaiman inaugurated *Al-Rawi* (The Narrator) and, a month later, Nicola Zika began publication of *Fawaqih Al-Arman* (Fruits of the Spirit). In the following decade, Syrians remained in the vanguard. In 1892 Hujji Zaidan launched *Al-Hilal* (The Crescent), Naguib and Amin Haddad founded *Lisan Al-Arab* (The Arab Tongue) in August 1894 and two years later Nicola Shahada began publication of *Al-Ra'id Al-Masri* (The Egyptian Pioneer).

Native Egyptians soon, however, began to offer stiff competition. The rising strata of educated Egyptians were eagerly seeking greater opportunities for participation in all domains of public life, and journalism was quickly perceived as an instrument to advance this cause. There were two major reservoirs for this growing sector of intellectuals. The first was Al-Azhar, the graduates of which had had a special status in Egyptian journalism since its inception as editors and writers for the *Al-Waqaf Al-Masriya* (The Egyptian Official Gazette).

Exemplary of this class of Egyptian intellectuals was Sheikh Ali Yousef. "We first came across Sheikh Ali Yousef in *Al-Ahram* of 7 February 1887. The occasion was the announcement of a new publication, a literary, scientific, historical and humorous weekly newspaper called *Al-Adab* (Literature), published in Cairo and owned and edited by the talented Sheikh Ali Yousef."

Unfortunately, *Al-Adab* had a very short life-span as we learn from an *Al-Ahram* article printed at the end of that same year. The new newspaper, it announced, "has, on its own accord, temporarily suspended publications, although it will find us eagerly awaiting its return." But instead of a renovated *Al-Adab*, Sheikh Yousef produced *Al-Mu'ayyid* which remained for a considerable period of time one of the major periodicals of its day. The new publication was hailed by *Al-Ahram* as "containing and in keeping with its own reputation for vast knowledge, profound insight and lofty principles. We wish him and his newspaper speedy success."

The other set of Egyptian intellectuals

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At the end of the 19th century, Egypt had 169 newspapers and magazines, according to an official report by the British High Commission in Cairo. Strangely enough, there is no complete list of names of all the publications. But the commission's report commended the freedom of expression underlying the journalistic proliferation. In this instalment of his chronicles of Egypt's modern history, Dr Yunan Labib Rizq tells how journalists flourished in the last two decades of the 19th century despite British military occupation



came from the secular schools, notably the Royal Law Academy. To illustrate this category, we have selected individuals representing the two social strata from which it emanated.

Ahmed Lutfi El-Sayed, the son of a major landowner in Dapahliya and eventually the editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram*, a leading newspaper of the early 20th century, made an early mark in the field of Egyptian journalism.

Perhaps more representative of this class of landed aristocracy was Ismail Abaza, founder of *Al-Ahali* (The People). Abaza carried the title 'bek' and placed the following advertisement for his forthcoming newspaper: "The first, second and third editions will be available free of charge in the capital, the port cities and the provinces." Little further evidence is necessary to indicate Abaza's social standing.

Mustafa Kamel embodies the rising class of government employees who made up a substantial part of the intelligentsia of that era. *Al-Ahram* contains several references to the early journalistic career of this prominent nationalist leader. On 20 February 1893 it announced the appearance of *Al-Madrasa* (The School), a monthly educational journal. On 1 August 1899 it advertised *Al-Kawakib Al-Masri* (The Egyptian Star), a weekly literary magazine owned and edited by Mustafa Effendi Kamel.

As Egyptians gained increasing sway in the national press, the growing expatriate communities were also contributing to the growth of the newspaper industry. Indeed the newspaper stands at the end of the 19th century had become a virtual Babel of tongues, as preponderant and influential as their respective cultural communities.

The French, ranking only fourth in size among Egypt's foreign communities, had the largest number of newspapers. This

should not be too surprising, however, as French was the language of Egypt's educated classes as well as the lingua franca of many other Mediterranean peoples living in Egypt.

Illustrating this later category of French speakers, *Al-Ahram* on 28 January 1893 announced, "a new French-Greek humour and literary weekly, *Le Moustique* (The Mosquito), published in Port Said by Daoud de Georgi. May it meet with great success." The fact that this newspaper was partially published in French reflected the owner's intention to appeal to the many French-speaking Egyptian and non-Egyptian employees of the Suez Canal Company.

For similar reasons, some Egyptians preferred to publish in French, as we note from the following item dated 16 February 1894: "We give a hearty welcome to the appearance of the first issue of a French language political weekly published in Cairo by Mohamed Effendi Masoud."

Leading the English language press was the well-known *Egyptian Gazette* which received the backing of the British occupation authorities. Ranking second was the *Times of Egypt* which first appeared in 1885 and which was partially written in French.

New English language newspapers received none of the effusive welcome which *Al-Ahram*'s editors accorded to other newspapers, the French in particular. There is little mystery in this, given the editors' pro-French cultural bias and their anti-British political bias. Indeed, *Al-Ahram* waged its most vehement battles against *Al-Muqattam* and the *Egyptian Gazette*, the Arabic and English protagonists for the policies of the British occupation.

In spite of a relatively sizeable Italian community in Egypt, we find in *Al-Ahram* of the last two decades of the 19th century

only one announcement of a new Italian newspaper. Appearing on 5 April 1889, it said, "Alexandria welcomes the first issue of *Operario* (The Worker) which investigates many political, scientific and literary topics. We wish it every success."

Similarly, the German press receives a lone mention in April 1887 when *Al-Ahram* heralds the forthcoming publication of a new German newspaper. "We have been informed that the German language *La Germania* will be appearing soon in the capital. It will be published twice a week." The announcement, however, was premature. The newspaper, to our knowledge, never did appear. Perhaps its prospects were doomed by the relatively small numbers of Germans in Egypt and by the relatively few numbers of Egyptians who could read German, in spite of their admiration for that country.

As one might expect from such a surge of newspapers, there evolved a climate of prolific journalistic creativity.

There were periodicals that catered to a range of specialist interests, notably in the fields of medicine, the law and economy. Medical periodicals had the lion's share of *Al-Ahram*'s new publications column. In August 1887 the newspaper announced that it had received the first issue of *Al-Siha* (Health), a magazine produced by a group of Egypt's most prominent physicians of the time.

Around this time, *Al-Ahram* also notified its readers of the recently published *Al-Shifa* (Medicine) "founded and edited by the venerable scientist, Dr. Shibli Shumail". It was not long afterwards that the newspaper heralded *Tabib Al-Ila* (Family Doctor), which it praised as "containing much of beneficial interest in the field of medicine and health".

Law periodicals ranked second, with three magazines dealing with legal and judicial affairs.

In the field of economics there was firstly *Al-Ilan* (The Advertisement), a curious magazine that we will leave to *Al-Ahram* to describe. This new magazine, it says, "is very useful, as it contains all information concerning advertisements, commercial news, prices, agricultural affairs and the types of crops. In addition to a literary work, every issue also contains a riddle and offers a valuable prize to whoever solves it. The splendid magazine appears once a week and is distributed for free to advertisers, official agencies, port authorities, houses of commerce and to whoever requests it." Another economic periodical was *Al-Murasalat Al-Gadida* (New Correspondence) "a magazine on commerce, industry, science and the arts", owned and operated by a Frenchman. There was also *Al-Yanasib* (The Lottery), which, according to *Al-Ahram*, was a "financial, economic, commercial and literary journal founded by David Farhi." That the owner was Jewish was only natural given the prominent role this community played in the Egyptian economy at the time.

In such quantity and variety, the Egyptian press played a vital role in the daily

lives of Egyptians. The daily habit of opening one's favourite newspaper in the morning had already taken root over 100 years ago. No better testimony could serve to illustrate this than *Al-Ahram*'s remark in its 26 July 1894 edition, "The greatest proof of how important newspapers have become in our country is the concern and anxiety evinced by our readers when the publication of *Al-Ahram* was delayed by one hour yesterday morning."

A flourishing newspaper industry naturally gave rise to a new and expanding professional sector. Indeed, so quickly did the ranks of journalists swell that even as early as 1895 members of this profession began to call for a syndicate. *Al-Ahram* was in the vanguard of the appeal. Its editor-in-chief, Bichara Taqia, had enumerated the benefits of such a syndicate, but he found official response frustratingly slow. Addressing the powers that be, he wrote, "In spite of the fact that you, sirs, have not responded to our appeal, we will not despair of reaching our goal. The need for a syndicate is becoming ever more evident and the day will come when it will be the only alternative." Sadly, Taqia would not live to see that day.

The press was becoming increasingly powerful, but power also had its murky sides. Some journalists in fact were suspected of being on the government payroll as *Al-Ahram* of 13 April 1894 suggests. "It is rumored," it reports shrewdly, "that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has allocated 800 pounds from its secret budget in order to silence some members of the press."

Suspiciousness of this sort is at least partially responsible for the debate over journalistic ethics. The journalist, writes *Al-Ahram*, "must be of a rectitude that is immune to both criticism and flattery." Bichara Taqia himself would have an opinion to contribute: "May the hand of every impostor be paralysed, may the tongue be severed of every swindler and liar who attempts to dress tyranny and oppression in the garb of reform and justice, may wretchedness befall the shameless scoundrels who, having drunk from the well, cast stones into it."

Nor was the debate restricted to the professionals. Readers themselves joined in, such as the following reader from Assiut who complained, "Newspapers are no longer the champions of exposing the facts, but rather they have become the instruments for spurious allegations and personal slander. The harm this has done to the value and esteem of the press is incalculable."

Perhaps, responded *Al-Ahram*, "the solution is to import that new invention in Russia — a newspaper printed on cigarette paper which can be read and then used to wrap tobacco. That way people can burn those articles they do not want to keep!"

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.





## Privatising education is the solution

Faced with onerous legal and administrative hurdles, the private sector is shying away from investing in the educational system, writes Mohamed Abdel-Fattah Ragab

Over the past few years, the government has expended tremendous effort and injected a great deal of capital into improving and reforming the educational system, to the delight of the business community. Under the auspices of the Education Minister Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin, an average of five new schools are opened daily. But while the expansion in the educational system is highly visible, it still falls short of the explosive student population growth rate.

At the heart of the debate over educational reform is the question: are our schools failing because we spent too little on them, or because of the way they are organised?

More resources are part of the answer, but our public schools also suffer from the over-centralisation and bureaucratic rigidity that plagues government organisations in general. And while I am in favour of privatising education, we cannot afford to leave education entirely to be shaped by consumer and market forces. We must save, not abandon, our public schools.

What is required is a change of structure and incentives that will encourage public schools to improve on the basis of their own initiative, for their own interest and from their own resources.

For example, the hiring and training of highly qualified teachers does not meet the needs dictated by the student population growth rate. If the status quo does not change, our future generations will suffer due to shortage of resources resulting from this gap between the demand for more teachers and schools and the rate at which the educational system is expanding.

The business community in Egypt is convinced of the need to participate in the development of the educational system. Private businesses have contributed by donating new school premises to the Ministry of Education.

They are understanding of the financial burden placed on the Egyptian budget after new economic policies were implemented that required a change in the laws governing the educational system.

The business community recognises that a number of impediments stand in the way of private sector involvement in education. In order to encourage the private sector to participate in education, their investments should be self-sustaining. However, Law 306, which deals with private sector education, affords the Ministry of Education the right to set school fees which, in most cases, do not cover the administrative costs of the school. In turn, such legislation affects the quality of education, and leads to the crowding of students into classes, under-qualified teachers and low quality equipment. We believe that if each school is given a free hand to set its fees, then the quality of the education will improve given the ensuing competition to provide the best services. This, in turn, will encourage and increase investment in that field.

At this point it should be noted that schools not governed by this law, including an increasing number of foreign schools operating in Egypt, which are setting their own fees based on the laws of supply and demand, are providing students with quality education.

In addition, laws and regulations governing the licensing of new universities and institutes of higher learning tend to place obstacles in the path of investments in these fields. For instance, it is not permitted for any individual or corporation to start a new university except under the umbrella of a non-profit organisation. These organisations' profits are not to exceed four per cent of the invested capital.

Furthermore, to establish institutions of higher education, non-profitable organisations must own the premises. Since buildings might cost millions of pounds such a law becomes a true impediment.

Current laws do not permit private educational institutions to form joint ventures with foreign institutions. In addition, Ministry of Education red tape can delay the licensing of new schools and educational institutions for months and, in some cases, years. The main cause of the delay seems to be that the administrative department responsible for issuing licences for such projects is entrusted with many other responsibilities. This should be the sole responsibility of a separate department.

Also, non-profit organisations are governed by Law 32 of 1964 which gives local authorities the right to dissolve the board of directors of these institutions at will. In effect, this means that the government has the right to dismiss the people who have raised the money and made the effort to start such a project.

In addition to the obstacles posed by unsympathetic laws, Egypt also faces a fundamental challenge: reversing the stark and growing disparity between the fate of college educated and non-college educated youth in our society. In the new global economy, the collective skills and capacities of a nation's workforce are its main competitive advantage.

The strategy of an apprenticeship system that combines classroom instruction with on-the-job training at local businesses should be immediately implemented.

To build this system we need to develop a combined work-based and school-based curriculum that involves spending increasing amounts of time at the work site.

To meet the demands of a growing student population, changing local and international economic conditions, the Egyptian education system is in need of an overhaul. For this to happen, the government should take the necessary legal and administrative measures to make education an investor-friendly sector.

The writer is chairman of the Alexandria Businessmen's Association.

# Basking in success

A pillar of the economic reform programme, foreign exchange companies enter their fifth year of activity in the Egyptian market with mixed feelings. Shahira Samy assesses their performance

Few could have been more surprised than foreign exchange company representatives themselves with their success over the past four years following the government's introduction of economic liberalisation measures in 1991.

While the government's reform initiatives aimed at abolishing the thriving currency exchange black market and stabilising the Egyptian pound in relation to other major currencies, most notably, the US dollar, four years of growth and change have yielded more than expected. Currency exchange companies have managed to attract 28.9 per cent (\$5.13 billion) of the total hard currency sources.

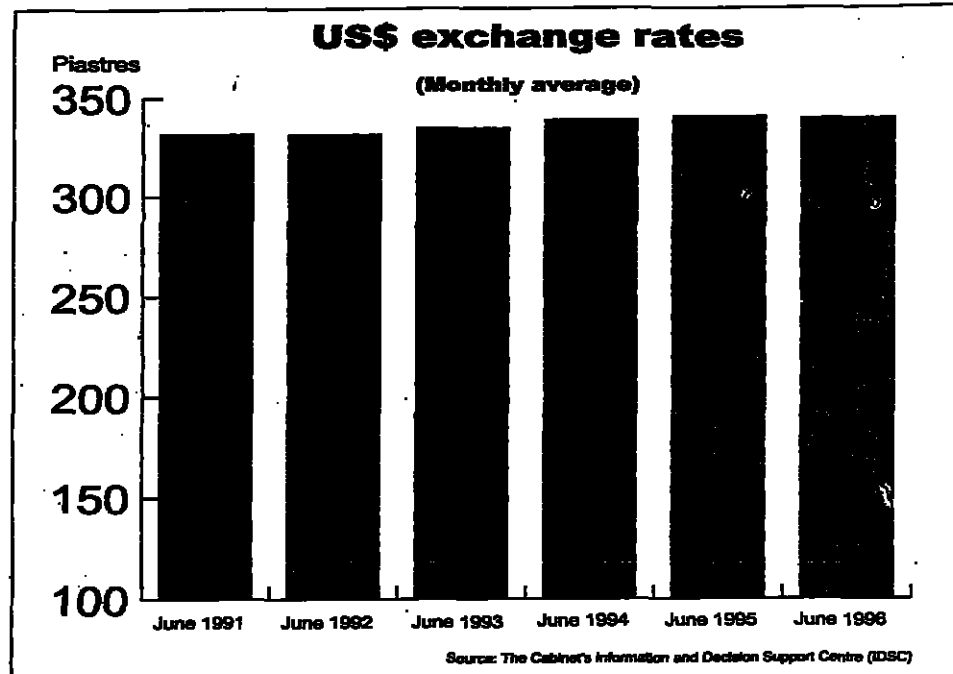
According to Ismail Hassan, governor of the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE), foreign exchange companies operating in Egypt annually inject up to 25 per cent of the CBE's foreign currency reserves. The CBE's reserves, over the past year, totalled \$18.3 billion compared to \$16.8 billion the year before.

The financial contribution by these companies to the CBE's reserves is not the only thing growing since the Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade (now the Ministry of Economy and International Cooperation) passed a decree in 1991 allowing non-banking sector companies to deal in foreign currency exchange. Over the past five years, the number of foreign exchange companies has rocketed to 90, with 106 other affiliated branches in operation.

At first, when the decree was passed and companies like this began to enter the market, said Ibrahim El-Mizlawi, the owner of the Misr Exchange Company, the first to enter this new market, "rumours abounded about the sky-rocketing value of the dollar, people's reaction to these companies and how to set the correct value of the currencies." However, years of trial and not much error have proven that these companies provide an invaluable service to the national economy. El-Mizlawi added that not only have foreign exchange companies brought in revenue and eliminated the black market, but they have also helped reshape the population's attitude about saving foreign currencies.

Even so, however, government officials caution against overdoing too much of a good thing. Although applications for licensing new companies have been extended in Cairo and other large cities, the government has decided not to allow additional companies to operate in Cairo, Giza, Alexandria and Port Said. These four governorates play host to roughly 75 per cent of all foreign currency companies operating in Egypt.

Rather, the government is attempting to encourage new growth in less privileged areas, a decision with which El-Mizlawi, who feels the market can absorb many more newcom-



Source: The Cabinet's Information and Decision Support Centre (DISC)

ers, differs.

Other efforts by large currency exchange companies to open offices in neighbouring Arab countries have also met with failure. Arguing that these initiatives would be against the law, government officials explained that should such a move occur, copious problems relating to varying exchange rates and regulatory measures would emerge. The CBE, officials maintain, would not be able to carry out its duties efficiently in this new climate.

Currency exchange company representatives, however, find this a bitter pill to swallow. Branch offices in Arab countries, they stress, would facilitate the transfer of funds by Egyptians working in Arab countries.

However, counters the CBE's Hassan, "Transfer of funds from one country to another is a banking sector responsibility. Foreign currency exchanges were established to prove that banks would not monopolising the foreign currency exchange market, not to perform tasks earmarked for banks."

But some company officials like Sayed Abdel-Mohsen, manager of the Arab Group for Foreign Exchange, say the issue is not so clear-cut. For example, to transfer funds between their head offices and their branches, foreign exchange companies need to go through the banking sys-

tem, which is a time-consuming and expensive process. Abdel-Mohsen and others interviewed by the Weekly, feel it would be more efficient to circumvent the costly bank transfer channel.

Although he pointed out that market needs may dictate changes in regulations, the CBE's Hassan, said no additions will be made to the responsibilities of foreign exchange companies in the near future.

However he said that "on the whole, establishing foreign exchange bureaus has been a successful experience. They have contributed considerably in stabilising foreign currency markets and have complemented the activities of banks," he stated.

Despite some obstacles, however, investors in foreign currency bureaus find that business is still booming, albeit at a slower rate than in 1991. Statistics reveal that in 1991, the average daily business for each company was \$1 million, but in 1992, this figure dropped to \$200,000 and finally reached \$100,000 per day per company in 1993.

Aside from increased competition, this drop was the result of, say analysts, a decrease in Egyptian exports which coincided with an increase in imports. In 1994, the value of Egyptian exports equaled nearly \$4 million while imports reached \$12 million.

Other contributing factors were declining revenues from the Suez Canal coupled with a decreasing volume of funds transferred by Egyptian expatriates, many of whom returned home following the Gulf War.

Although exchange company officials were dismayed at the 1-2 piastre per dollar drop in their profit margin, El-Mizlawi said this decline was only natural given the transitional period. "It's the price of freedom," he explained, referring to the government's liberalisation measures.

The government has so far been careful not to render this price too high. With almost 80 per cent of transactions taking place through the dollar, the CBE has been working in the background, buying and selling to ensure that no major fluctuations in the currency values occur. However, Ismail Hassan, who dubs this process as "passive intervention," says this only occurs upon request by the banks.

But, there's more to these companies' success than passive intervention, or even small exchanges by individuals. "We focus on tourist, export and import companies which are regular companies," said Raafat Sagr, deputy chairman of the Alexandria International Currency Exchange Company. "That's why we try to attract their business by offering them special rates."

The CBE's role and regulations despite some obstacles they present, add other company officials, are really for the benefit of all the parties involved. Even so, there are some wrinkles to be ironed out. The single price policy for exchange rates in both the company headquarters and branch offices, stated Abdel-Mohsen, should be revised. Branch offices, he noted, could do better business by offering a slightly different rate of exchange.

"We should be given more leeway and responsibilities so as to offer better service to our clients," he said.

And bureaucracy — that red, government devil — again seems to be a cause for concern among currency exchange company owners. "Since we have installed a computer system to store our records and communicate with the CBE," asked the co-owner of a major exchange company, "why is it necessary to waste time and effort sending them written reports three times a day?"

The most significant change owners of exchange bureaus would like to see materialise is the formation of some sort of official body that will represent their interests. Although the Egyptian Chamber of Commerce has a special division for foreign exchange companies, El-Mizlawi, who is also a board member of this committee, asserts that it is fairly inactive and must play a greater role in the future.

## Techno aid for privatisation

Three agreements financed by USAID to encourage the development of Egypt's private sector and economic growth were signed last week, reports Mona El-Fiqi

As part of the US-Egypt Partnership for Economic Development Programme (PEDP), a \$293.4 million grant will be provided by the US to assist Egypt in its economic reform programme. The grant will be used to establish two technological centres and to support private sector companies.

The first agreement sets aside \$13.4 million for expediting the technology available to Egyptian private sector firms through the establishment of a technological centre in Cairo and one in Alexandria.

The centres will assist Egyptian businessmen, especially those involved in export, to obtain state-of-the-art technology.

The start-up phase of this project will be spearheaded by the International Executive Service Corps, a private, voluntary US organisation supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The IESC has a proven track record of helping Egyptian private sector firms increase their competitiveness and their growth rate.

The second agreement is a \$200 million grant for the Private Sector Commodity Import Programme (PRCIP). The money will be distributed through 20 participating Egyptian banks in the form of short and medium term trade and investment loans for importing equipment and materials from the US. The PRCIP, which was launched in 1986, operates through banks, loaning out capital at the market rate, but with grace periods that vary depending on the project specifications.

The third accord signed provides the Egyptian government with \$80 million in cash to bolster its economic reform and structural adjustment programmes.

Toxi Christiansen Wagner, acting-deputy director for USAID in Egypt, said that this \$80 million grant is the first part of a \$400 million US cash transfer which will take place over the next two years and aims to assist the Egyptian government in proceeding with its reform initiatives.

The US has, since 1992, provided another \$320 million for the

same purpose.

The agreements, which were signed by Nawal El-Tatawi, minister of economy and international cooperation, Venice Kamel Gouda, minister of scientific research, and the US Ambassador to Egypt, Edward Walker, are part of the PEDP which was launched in September 1994 and aims at promoting bilateral economic relations, stimulating Egypt's economic growth rate and creating jobs in the country.

Walker said that the main goal of the PEDP is to increase the role of the private sector in the economy, improve Egypt's competitive position in global markets and fuel economic reform in the country.

"The Egyptian government," said Walker, "has been working to create a more positive business environment and has made serious reforms in agriculture and the economy." The new cabinet under Prime Minister Kamal El-Ghazouli, he added, has accelerated the pace of the reforms in all sectors.

## Few buyers for beer

An unexpectedly weak demand for shares of Al-Ahram Beverage Company has raised questions and concerns about the company's future, reports Shereen Abdel-Razek

While investors flocked to purchase shares of other recently-privatised companies, Al-Ahram Beverage Company (ABC) has not been so fortunate. The six day subscription period, in which investors were afforded the chance to buy up to 20 per cent of the company's shares, closed with only 667,500 shares sold out of the total 920,000 offered.

The main reason behind the lagging demand, believes Mohamed Bakir, head of the privatisation unit in ABC's parent company, the Holding Company for Housing, Tourism and Cinema, stems from a misunderstanding. Upon evaluating the company, it was discovered that its real estate accounted for two-thirds of the value of its assets. Consequently, the earnings per share would be low as the shares are over-valued and do not reflect the company's real performance level. In a bid to compensate for this, the Higher Ministerial Privatisation Committee shifted the ownership of the land to the HCHTC which, in turn, leased it to ABC. This step, however, was misinterpreted by investors who thought that the company was selling its assets because it was suffering a loss and refrained from buying into ABC.

But, said Bakir, this move actually increased the earnings per share to about 11 per cent compared to the three or four per cent that would have been realised prior to this move. Market observers cited a different reason for the low demand for ABC's shares. Some believe that many investors were unwilling, for religious reasons, to buy into a company that produces beer. ABC is Egypt's sole producer of beer.

Whatever the reason, negotiations are currently under way between company representatives, banks and insurance companies to buy up the remaining shares for sale, said Bakir. The HCHTC is also considering other offers for majority stake purchases. "We are now seeking an offer which is made up of a financial and technical package," he said. "What we really need is a company with the know-how that can upgrade ABC's production lines."

In February, ABC's holding company sent out an invitation for bids to sell a majority stake in the company to an anchor investor. The negotiating team formed by HCHTC had already rejected two bids submitted by anchor investors which they deemed too low.

In the first half of fiscal year 1995-96, ABC posted after-tax profits of LE31.62 million. In fiscal 1994-95, after-tax profits had totalled LE42.96 million. While Bakir declined to give figures on the company's assets, market experts estimate their value at LE450 million.

## Market report

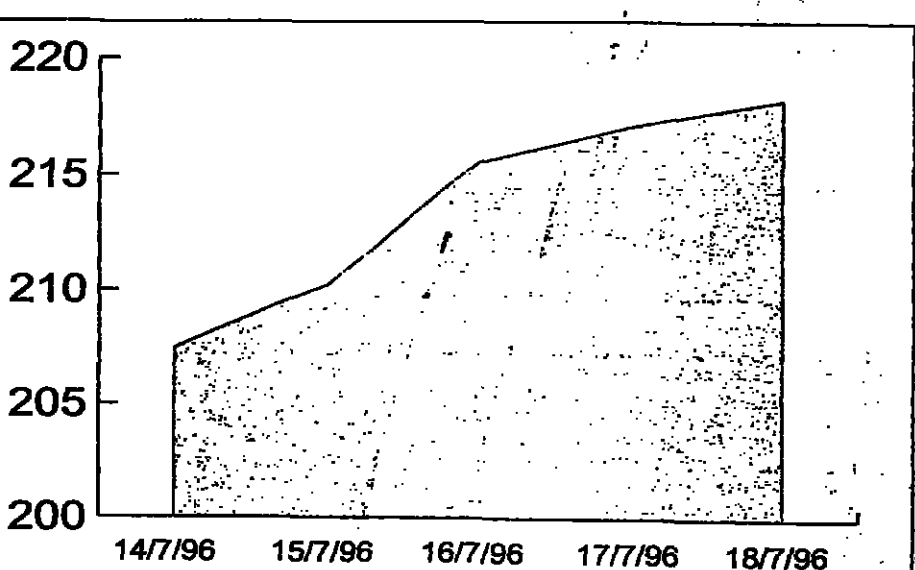
TRADING action on the Egyptian Stock Exchange was heavy for the week ending 18 July, with all the indices gaining points. The General Market Index gained an impressive 12.49 points to close at 218.9, reflecting the arrival of the long-awaited recovery in the price of shares. This week, the shares of 46 companies increased in value. However, the value of shares traded dropped to LE82 million compared to LE89 million the week before.

Market experts attributed this week's sudden burst of activity to a number of factors, among which was the share cross-listing agreement recently finalised between the Egyptian Capital Market Authority and the Bahraini Stock Exchange.

The manufacturing sector's index recorded an increase of 11.59 points to level off at 277.54. The sector's biggest winner was the Paints and Chemical Industries Company, whose shares closed at LE650 compared to their opening price of LE630. Shares of the Egypt Electric Cables Company (Kabelat) increased in value by LE12 per share to settle at LE90, while trading in the shares of the Suez Cement Company was responsible for LE9.8 million in shares. Trading of the company's shares, which accounted for 11.94 per cent of total dealing, resulted in an LE1.35 gain in the company's share price. They closed at LE43.4. Only four of the sector's companies registered a loss. Leading the way was the United Arab Spinning and Weaving Company, whose shares fell by LE1.35 to close at LE33.5.

This week was a blessing for financial and real estate sector companies. The sector's index gained 27.3 points to close at 232.27. Medinat Nasr Housing and Development Company's

## GMI rockets up



(MNHD) bid to purchase 65 per cent of El-Kahera Housing and Development Company (KHD) paid off for both companies. Shares of the KHD registered the market's highest increase in share value with an LE27 per share jump. Those of the MNHD gained LE16.5 to close at LE113.5.

Foreign investor potential interest in purchasing the Commercial International Bank's depository receipts, which are to be traded on the London Stock Exchange this week, has fueled domestic demand for shares in the bank. CIB's shares gained LE13.5 to level off at LE417.5. Shares of the Port Said Investment and Industrial Development Company, however, suffered the heaviest loss, declining by 14.25 per cent of their opening value to close at LE92.14.

Edited by Ghada Ragab

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# Home at last

A German-brokered swap deal marks the first breakthrough this year in tensions between Hizbullah and Israel, writes Zeina Khodr from Beirut

A German-mediated bodies for prisoners exchange between Hizbullah and Israel was pulled off this week, despite a last-minute snag which threatened to scuttle the operation.

Observers and the media gave different interpretations as to the significance of the exchange and how it will affect South Lebanon and the Middle East.

Bonn achieved a lot. It has proved that its "critical dialogue" with Iran, which has been criticised, is fruitful. Bonn enjoys good ties with Tehran, which supports and funds Hizbullah.

Under the deal, Hizbullah was to hand over the remains of two Israeli servicemen, Rachamin Al-Sheikh and Yossi Fink, to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). ICRC officials received the remains in two metal coffins in Beirut's southern suburbs. They then handed the bodies to German officials headed by top intelligence chief Bernd Schmidbauer at Beirut International Airport. Schmidbauer had sealed the agreement two days earlier after holding talks in Beirut and Damascus. Syria is the main power broker in Lebanon with 35,000 troops in the country.

Hizbullah also handed over to the ICRC 17 prisoners belonging to the Israeli-occupied South Lebanon Army (SLA).

The deal reportedly stipulated that once Schmidbauer takes custody of the remains of the soldiers and flies to Israel, Israel will simultaneously free prisoners from the Khiam detention centre in Israeli-occupied South Lebanon and return the bodies of martyrs who died in clashes with Israeli forces on the border.

The German military plane took off in the morning with the remains of the soldiers. But there was no prisoner exchange at Kfar Tibnit border crossing, some 80 kilometres south of Beirut, until late in the afternoon. The crossing, manned by SLA militiamen, is one of five that lead into the Israeli-occupied zone in the south.

The 15-hour delay was because the 17 freed prisoners refused to return to occupied South Lebanon. After being released in Beirut, they were taken by the ICRC to Kfar Tibnit where they waited in Red Cross vehicles parked a couple of kilometres from the border crossing. ICRC officials said they were free to decide on their own if they wanted to re-enter the occupied zone.

The entire process nearly broke down since Israel and the SLA insisted on their return. Families and relatives of some of the prisoners live in Beirut and other places outside the Israeli-occupied areas. Each of the 17 prisoners had their own reason for not wanting to go back though their main concern was for their safety. They also did not want to be re-integrated into the SLA militia.

Many of the freed captives had been held for more than 10 years without trial. Physical and psychological torture are systematic at Khiam, a hilltop jail in the south run by the SLA under Israeli supervision.

Negotiations for Sunday's exchange reportedly began four months ago. Schmidbauer said he will continue efforts to achieve a comprehensive solution to the issue of missing Israeli servicemen in Lebanon and the Arab prisoners. Israel holds some 300 Lebanese and other Arab prisoners in Khiam and Israeli jails. Four Israeli servicemen are still missing in Lebanon and Israel believes that only one, Ron Arad, is still alive. It says he is being held by Iran or Hizbullah. Both have denied knowledge of his whereabouts. But Hizbullah has promised to seek information about Arad as the basis for continuing German-mediated negotiations with Israel on a comprehensive prisoner swap.

Some analysts linked the exchange to the upcoming elections in Lebanon, saying that Hizbullah would gain ground in the elections with the release. A columnist in the *Al-Safir* daily said the positive cooperation between Hizbullah and Israel may be part of a general relaxation of tension in the south following the April ceasefire understanding.

While some families were happy to see their loved ones again after so many years, there were many others whose relatives remain locked up in Israeli jails. But the positive atmosphere prevailing and the positive statements made by both sides on this issue may be the beginning of the final chapter in the detainees files.



A member of Hizbullah covers the coffin of dead guerrillas ahead of the mass funeral held last Tuesday (photo: Reuters)

## Bill maddens EU

The US Senate has moved to punish foreign businesses that invest in Iran and Libya, reports Rasha Saad

The US Iran-Libya Oil Sanctions Bill, supported by the Clinton administration, outlines sanctions to be imposed on foreign firms that invest \$40 million or more in key sectors of both Libya and Iran, two countries accused by the United States of sponsoring state terrorism.

Similar to the new law that penalises foreign companies investing in Cuba, the Iran-Libya bill has been strongly criticised by US allies who say the US is trying to unilaterally force trade policies on them.

Under the Senate bill, foreign firms would face sanctions if they contribute to the two countries' weapons production, their oil industries or their aviation capabilities.

In the event that a foreign firm violates the ban, the president would be directed to choose two of six possible sanctions: denying export-import bank loans,

denying export licences, barring US banks from making loans of more than \$10 million a year to sanctioned parties, barring sanctioned financial institutions from being primary dealers of US government bonds, banning US government procurement of goods and services from sanctioned entities, and imposing import sanctions.

European Commission President Jacques Santer said that Europe is ready to act against the US bill.

Santer said that the Iran-Libya bill creates an even graver problem because 20 per cent of Europe's crude oil comes from both countries. In 1994, EU nations imported 483 million tons of crude oil, of which 48 million came from Iran and 51 million from Libya.

Santer also criticised the US for presuming to "legislate in extra-territorial matters" and described the bill as "unacceptable".

Arab press reports indicated that the conflict of interests between Europe and the US intensified after the 1991 Gulf War and the victory of the US-led forces. Europe feels that the US makes unilateral decisions according to its own interests and then forces its Western allies to implement them.

Observers believe that Europe will always reject the notion of being blindly led by the US even if it is the only super power at the present time. Arab observers have criticised the double-standard policies of the US. They believe that the US is lobbying to impose sanctions on Libya, Iran and Cuba, while at the same time, it has exercised pressure on Arab countries to end their boycott against Israel under the pretext that this boycott violates international conventions and will lead to a counter-reaction from the isolated country.

Both Libya and Iran did not comment on the US bill. However, they previously condemned it when it was first suggested last year.

Iran said that sanctions would not affect its economy as much as it would cause great losses to the US and European companies. It also accused President Clinton of trying to win Jewish votes in the upcoming presidential elections. The bill also coincided with the UN decision to extend air and diplomatic sanctions against Libya for another two months. Libya criticised the decision and the US rejection of any compromise to solve the Lockerbie issue and save thousands of Libyans who are suffering due to the sanctions. The three Western countries concerned with the Lockerbie issue — the US, France and Britain —

did not issue a joint communiqué to announce the extension of sanctions against Libya as was the case on previous occasions.

Libyan-French relations witnessed an important development recently when Libya allowed a French magistrate to investigate the bombing of the French UTA airliner over the Sahara Desert in September 1989.

The Libyans hoped that their warm welcome to the French will positively affect Libya's position in the Lockerbie issue. However, there has been no sign of this.

According to press reports, France rejects the US notion of a new world order and believes that there are emerging powers such as Europe, Japan and China, that will offset US domination. Since French President Jacques Chirac came into office last year, France has been trying to pursue an effective policy in the Middle East to match its economic presence.

France also tried to prove its role as a mediator in the Middle East peace process and it maintains that it can contribute to securing peace in the Middle East now and in the future thanks to its friendship with both Syria and Lebanon.

The French Foreign Minister Hervé de Charette this week toured Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, the Palestinian self-rule areas and Israel, to assess how France could best contribute to efforts to resume peace talks between the Arabs and Israel.

France supported the Arab stance in both the recent G7 gathering in Lyons and the EU summit in Florence and supports the principle of land-for-peace. After the Cairo Arab Summit last June, President Mubarak flew to France and presented an overview of the summit to President Chirac.

It is a happy coincidence that we discuss this week, on the anniversary of the Egyptian revolution, the prickly subject of Egyptian-Sudanese relations. It was the Egyptian revolution that created a radically new basis for Egyptian-Sudanese relations. It marked a radical departure from old perceptions of Sudan as a subject nation. Sudan, for the first time in history, was treated as a sovereign nation, with an independent and unique identity quite distinct from Egypt's. It was — and this is a truism that every Sudanese acknowledges — the 23 July revolution that initiated the wise decision to grant the Sudanese people the right to national self-determination, which eventually led to the independence of Sudan in 1956.

What is different today is the totally new charged atmosphere that looms over Egyptian-Sudanese relations. This was softened somewhat in recent weeks by President Hosni Mubarak's friendly initiative and his extension of an invitation to Sudanese President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir to visit Egypt and attend the Cairo Arab Summit last month. There are many in both Egypt and Sudan who see this new development as heralding a new beginning, a fresh start in Egyptian-Sudanese relations. However, there are others who see that the Bashir regime has not mended its ways and that, therefore, Cairo should not open a new chapter in its relations with Khartoum.

Relations between the people of Egypt and Sudan are long-standing, indeed eternal. They are characterised by strategic depth and are not dependent on fluctuations in relations between the leaderships in Cairo and Khartoum. There are eight other countries that border Sudan, but the Sudanese opposition has chosen Cairo as its central base for political operations.

The Sudanese opposition, represented by the umbrella National Democratic Alliance, recognises that Egypt conducts itself as a nation state and not as a political party when it comes to tackling Sudanese issues. As long as the Sudanese government feigns innocence of the accusations levelled against it, Egypt is obliged to try and woo Sudan back into the Arab fold and ease tensions between Cairo and Khartoum. The Sudanese opposition forces are aware of this fact. They realise that it is realpolitik. But that does not stop them from voicing concern about the goings on in Sudan. In short, the Sudanese opposition is determined to highlight certain key issues that cannot be overlooked.

Firstly, never in the modern history of Sudan has a regime emerged which has shown such hostility towards Egypt as the current Bashir regime has. Secondly, after six years of hard and concerted efforts, the Sudanese opposition has succeeded in isolating Khartoum internationally and regionally — both in the Arab and the African arenas. It has also succeeded in mobilising the vast majority of the Sudanese people against the regime. Thirdly, there are strong indications that the regime has reached the brink. It has failed to give the Sudanese people anything but hunger, deprivation, economic mismanagement, the collapse of the Sudanese economy and the paralysis of the state services. Fourthly, it is impossible and too late for the regime to alter its ideological orientation. The leopard will not change its spots.

The leaders of the Sudanese opposition do not hide their concern over the signs of rapprochement between Cairo and Khartoum. A clear definition must be established of what Egypt wants from Sudan and what Sudan wants from Egypt. The definition must be based on the experience of the relationship between the two countries and must take into account the interests of each.

The writer is a former Sudanese minister of national guidance.

## Will the leopard change its spots?

Mahgoub Othman welcomes Egypt's gestures of goodwill towards Sudan, but warns that the Khartoum regime is unlikely not respond in kind

## US to redeploy forces

The US is planning to move its forces in Saudi Arabia to remote locations, writes Hoda Tawfik from Washington

For United States President Bill Clinton's administration, it is a matter of the utmost importance in an election year to demonstrate to Congress and the American people that it is doing everything possible to protect people in uniform. Indeed, during the last four months of the election campaign, the pressing question facing the Clinton administration has been whether to remain in the Gulf, and the Middle East as a whole, amid the increasing threat of terrorism against American forces and installations in the area.

On 25 June, 19 US air force personnel were killed and 364 injured when a massive car bomb exploded at an apartment complex near the Dhahran air base. A somewhat similar incident occurred on 13 November 1995 at a US-staffed Saudi National Guard

communication centre in Riyadh, where five of the seven killed and about half of the 60 wounded were Americans.

It is still unclear whether these terrorist acts portend more violence to come. But a senior US defence official said, "No matter what we do and how careful we are, there will be further attempts. And in all probability, some of those attempts will succeed. In a sense, like the one at the Khobar Towers."

Secretary of Defence William Perry said, "My answer to the question 'Should we stay in Saudi Arabia?' is yes. We are there because of the vital national security interests of the United States, for the protection of the world's oil reserves, for the security of the Gulf and the stability of the Middle East region, and for the containment of Iran and Iraq."

Perry called for "drastic changes" in the way American forces are deployed abroad. His new programme, called Force Protection Initiative, could cost hundreds of millions, perhaps billions, of dollars and involve not only the redeployment of up to 4,000 troops within Saudi Arabia, but adjustments to US forces in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Turkey and Bosnia. Details of the plan will be presented within the next few weeks, but Perry said, "We want to move quickly to accomplish changes by the end of the summer."

A Saudi Arabian official in Washington said that his country will respond "positively" when US officials present a detailed plan for moving American troops from Saudi Arabian cities to more secure and remote military bases.

Reports of a rift between America and Saudi Arabia over the movement of US troops were denied by the State Department's spokesman, Nicholas Burns. He said that press reports claiming that Saudi Arabia's defence minister opposes the Pentagon's requests to move American soldiers in the kingdom to safer housing "do not correspond with US discussions with senior Saudi officials". Burns noted that an agreement existed at the highest level between the two countries to do whatever was necessary to protect US troops in Saudi Arabia.

Perry listed possible new measures. These include a possible shifting of up to 4,000 US troops to more remote bases. He spoke of moving some personnel from Riyadh or Dhahran to the Saudi

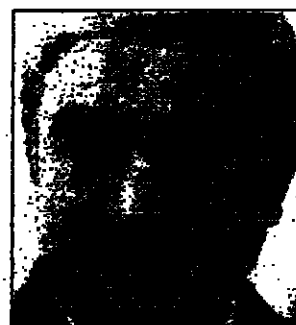
air base at Al-Kharj, about 60 miles south of Riyadh. He also mentioned putting more fences, barriers and guards at installations and establishing a combined intelligence centre — called a "fusion cell" — in Saudi Arabia that would bring together CIA and Saudi intelligence operatives. "We have to seek out information about terrorists, about their plans, how they are funded," Perry said in press statements.

The State Department has already announced that it is withdrawing family members of military personnel from Saudi Arabia. A department official said, "We are mindful of the fact that there were a number of threats before the Khobar bombing against American installations." But the official said that it is up to the family members whether they want to leave or not and that the action is a precautionary measure. "There is nothing new, there is no new threat that led to this decision," the official said.

A senior US defence official said that the story that the Saudis will not support moving US forces from urban areas to more remote bases is simply wrong. "We have something like 6,000 military people in Saudi Arabia, some 5,000 of them doing air operations. The bulk of those can be moved from the bases where they are operating to more remote bases," said the official.

But there are some sections of the US military based in the kingdom which cannot be moved with ease to remote areas. These are the ones which work with the Saudi National Guard and the Saudi military.

Algeria's national dialogue continues without the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and against a background of renewed violence, writes Amira Howeldy



Algerian president Zeroual



FIS leaders: Ali Belhadj and Abassi Madani

## FIS file "closed"

As Algerian President Liamine Zeroual opened the fourth round of national dialogue talks in Algiers this week, a bomb exploded 40 km away, killing five people and injuring 30 others. The talks continued, but ignored the issue of violence and focused on Zeroual's suggestions for amending the constitution.

Zeroual met delegates from 12 political parties and agreed to set up three mixed-party commissions to prepare for a national political conference, a referendum on constitutional changes and legislative elections to be held early next year. Participants in the talks, however, expressed their disappointment with the lack of communication between them and the president who did not discuss means to stop the continuing violence.

Coming eight months after Zeroual was elected, the dialogue is the fourth in a series of attempts to put an end to the state of insurgency which broke out in 1992, after the cancellation of the elections for the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was poised to win. Since then between 60,000 and 70,000 people have died in the conflict.

The first round of reconciliation talks, held at the beginning of 1994, was sponsored by then provisional Prime Minister Ahmed Ghasbi. The talks, which included the FIS, failed and were followed by the army's appointment of Zeroual as defense

minister at the time — to the presidency.

Zeroual then held a second national dialogue involving the major political parties, including the FIS. But bilateral talks between the FIS and the military government failed due to mutual distrust. The FIS rejected the conditions laid down by Zeroual because it was only offered limited political participation in return for a pledge to renounce violence.

Last April, however, Zeroual decided to pursue the dialogue without inviting the FIS — whose leaders have been imprisoned since 1992. Although he did not make statements explicitly excluding them, his decision raised speculation on the political future of the banned group.

Zeroual's "Project for Institutional Reform" forwarded to political parties, organisations and institutions two months ago, put an end to the controversy as it proposed major amendments to the 1989 constitution, the political parties law and the election law which ban the formation of religious parties.

The memorandum also suggested the establishment of an appointed *Umma* Council, besides the existing National Popular Council (NPC). Two months after Zeroual asserted that his memorandum is merely a "debatable suggestion" political party leaders regard it as good as a decree.

"When the government decides on something, it recruits everyone to bless its decisions," Abdel-Aziz Belkhadem, former speaker of the NPC, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview from Algiers. "This is what the current talks or consultations are about."

Belkhadem, who is also a member of the National Liberation Front's (FLN) central committee, said that his party has a set of priorities for dialogue concerning "how to put an end to the bloodshed, setting a framework for the coming elections and a comprehensive dialogue that includes all parties — without any exclusions." But he pointed out that "this does not seem to be important to everybody... [in the dialogue] we suggested methods to stop the violence but the government only talked about amending the constitution, the political parties law and the election law."

Asked about the aim of participating in repeatedly failed talks, Belkhadem said, "We [the FLN] want to find a solution to put this violence at an end, but the government's formula has nothing to do with reality because the crisis is not a problem of texts, but of policies."

A likely scenario, according to Belkhadem, is that Zeroual will pursue the talks with political organisations and syndicates, then begin bilateral talks with the parties which objected to the constitutional

amendments. This would be followed by a national reconciliation conference that would set the date for a public referendum for changing the constitution prior to the parliamentary elections expected to be held early next year.

Although many Algerian political parties, such as the Front for Socialist Forces (FFS), the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD), El-Nahda and Hamas back the FLN's stance, Zeroual's suggestions found support from others. The ex-communist Al-Tahadi Party and the Republican National Alliance (ANR) together with the secular parties represented in the appointed NPC have voiced their approval for amendments, particularly the article which suggests banning the formation of religious parties.

Although attempts were made early last year by the major parties to pressure the government to accept the FIS's political participation, the army's firm grip on the government stood in the way. Since Zeroual's election, officials have explicitly stated that there will be no dialogue with the outlawed group. The latest statement in that respect was made by Zeroual himself during last week's talks. Zeroual said "the FIS file has been closed". The president's non-negotiable stance of "peace without FIS" raises questions about his vision of a way out of the blood bath that claims the lives of at least 1,200 people each month.



# Black churches burn

In the last year and a half, 40 black churches have been burned down in the United States. Could such racist attacks be linked to a Republican Party resurgence in the American Deep South, asks **David Du Bois**

Religious institutions are among the most racially segregated institutions in the United States. On Sunday mornings blacks go to black churches and whites go to white churches. An occasional sprinkling of each in the other's congregations does not alter this overall pattern. Truly multi-racial congregations are exceedingly rare and invariably non-denominational. Only this year the 16-million member Southern Baptist Convention, the policy-making body of the largest Protestant denomination in America, officially apologised to black Baptists for its long-standing, anti-black racist policies and practices.

So, it should come as no surprise that in the current nationwide atmosphere of increasing racial-ethnic assertiveness, which has given rise to increasing racial separation, suspicion, antagonism and confrontation, black churches have again become the target of white supremacists' rage. It was the murder by fire-bombing in 1963 of four little black girls attending Sunday school at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, that alerted the nation to the horror of church burning and bombings in the South in the era of the civil rights movement.

Despite that alert, in the following summer 37 black churches were burnt down in the southern state of Mississippi alone. The Centre of Democratic Renewal, which monitors attacks against racial minorities and ethnic groups, reports that more than 80 black and multi-racial churches in 13 states have been fire-bombed, burned or vandalised since January 1990. Since January 1995, the number of black churches burned down stands at least at 40 in 13 states, and is rising. As of this writing the latest arson attack on a black church occurred in the northwest city of Portland, Oregon. The sanctuary of the Immanuel Christian Fellowship Church was completely destroyed by a deliberate

act of arson. Investigators, including agents from the Treasury Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, declined to discuss what evidence they had of arson. According to an Associated Press report on 21 June the congregation of the Immanuel Christian Fellowship Church is about 70 per cent black, and includes many Hispanics, Asians and a few whites. It is located in a predominantly black neighbourhood of Portland.

Historically the black church has been the single most important, most reliable and most regenerative refuge from the daily white racist insult and injury black Americans continually suffer in the US, physically and spiritually. This is true particularly throughout the southern states. Consequently, during the civil rights struggles of the 1960s it was the black church that provided many of the most effective black leaders. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr being the most notable. It was to black churches, great and small, urban and rural, that blacks flocked to organise voting rights campaigns, bus boycotts, launch counter-demonstrations and civil rights marches, and to coordinate activities locally, regionally and nationally. It was to the black church that they came to eulogise and bury murdered victims, and to reaffirm their determination to continue the struggle.

Many believe this is why black churches have been a prime target of white racists. Reliance on federal agencies — the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms — to investigate the fires and bring the perpetrators to justice was made necessary because nothing or very little was being done to find the culprits by local, county and state law enforcement personnel in the states affected. The experience of the 1960s established that most often, particularly throughout the South, local, county and state law enforcement personnel were

directly involved in racist attacks, often directed them and almost always knew the individuals in their areas most likely to be responsible for violence against the black community. Today civil rights advocates are demanding, therefore, that the current federal investigators concentrate on local, county and state law enforcement bodies and individuals for information about the current rash of black church burning.

US News & World Report of 24 June quotes Rev. Joseph Lowery of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, a leading black civil rights organisation, as saying: "We have been sorely disappointed that until recently law enforcement... [has] seemed only mildly interested in focusing on these acts of terrorism." Within the black community there is much resentment at the insistence of the newly arrived federal investigators to focus on pastors and parishioners of the churches attacked, suggesting insurance fraud or deliberate provocation. Civil Rights leaders are asking why the leaders and members of the local Ku Klux Klan and other white racist organisations, all well known in the southern white communities, are not being seriously pursued and questioned.

During the year and a half of the current rash of black church burning, black leaders have noted a surprising upsurge of Republican Party influence and political assertiveness throughout the South. Since the overthrow of the Republican Party's post-Civil War reconstruction effort to forge a place in "the American dream" for the newly freed and impoverished former slave by a coalition of southern Democrats and northern industrialists, "the solid South" has been traditionally allied to the Democratic Party. David S. Broder, writing in the *International Herald Tribune* of 18 June, asserts: "The transfer of the Republican power base from the Midwest and Northeast to the South is the

single most important transformation in the Republicans' 20th century history."

US News & World Report writes: "The South's takeover of Capitol Hill is now complete... Senate Republicans last week chose Mississippi's Trent Lott to succeed Bob Dole [Republican Party presidential hopeful] as majority leader. And they picked Oklahoma's Don Nickles for the No. 2 job, majority whip. With the House [of Representatives] already in the hands of a Georgian — Speaker Newt Gingrich and two Texans, Majority Leader Dick Armey and Majority Whip Tom DeLay — Southerners have their strongest hold on congressional leadership in decades."

Martin Woolacott writing in the *Guardian Weekly* of 30 June under the heading "Old Habits Die Hard in the Deep South" asserts: "The Republicans strive to imply that the Democrats are the creators, subsidisers and appeasers of a criminalised, welfare-dependent black society in the inner cities of the United States... This is the message that links all the ostensibly non-racial issues like welfare, big government, the death penalty and family values together. While related debates go on in countries that have smaller or no racial minorities, in the US race is the knot that ties the package up."

This is a classic example of political scapegoating: "The blacks are the cause of all our domestic ills." The success of this Republican Party effort is evident in the two-year swing from Democratic to Republican influence throughout the South, where indigenous, anti-black racism has never been rooted out. There are those who believe President Bill Clinton will lose his bid for re-election in November as a result of the Republican Party effectively using "the race card" nationally. The burning of black churches may only be a harbinger of worse things to come in this election year.

## Famine looms in southern Sudan

Alarm bells have been sounded that famine is about to break out in south Sudan, reports **Mariz Tadros**

For the south Sudanese, survival is becoming increasingly difficult. During the last two weeks two dozen people living in the small town of Maridi, southwest Sudan, have been killed or wounded by the Sudanese army's aerial bombings. Several hundred thousands more are on the brink of starvation because of a government ban on Hercules C-130 relief aircraft flying over the south. Many more are dying in the famine gripping the Nuba mountains in the west because Khartoum has prevented any relief aid from reaching them.

Last week the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), an extremist Ugandan Christian force, entered the United Nations refugee camp of Asholi Pili in Uganda and slaughtered at least 150 south Sudanese. The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) spokesman, Pagan Amum, in Nairobi said that a further 2,000 were captured and taken to the Sudanese government camp in Torit in southeast Sudan, which Amum claims is a training centre for the LRA.

Conditions in south Sudan have reached rock bottom, according to the United Nations World Food Programme, which warns of a widespread famine breaking out there. The organisation has protested that as a result of the Sudanese government's refusal to allow food-dropping aircraft to fly over the south, 700,000 people will soon be dead. UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali has urged the Sudanese government with "unilateral and unjustified obstruction of urgently required humanitarian assistance" to the south.

The Sudanese government has denied accusations that it is trying to starve the south. "The government would like to express its surprise and sorrow and would like to confirm the keenness of the Sudanese government to deliver relief to all persons affected by the war in the south," a Foreign Ministry statement said.

The latest report from the US-based Human Rights Watch on political repression in Sudan concedes that there are abuses by all parties in the war, including the SPLA.

Following the World Food Programme's complaints, Khartoum has partially lifted the ban it imposed in June 1995 on Hercules C-130 planes delivering aid to the south Sudanese. The ban was enforced on the pretext that such large planes were used to deliver arms to the SPLA, with which the government has been engaged in a bloody war for the last 13 years.

However, Abdon Agaw, acting chairman of the Cairo-based Sudanese Human Rights Organisation, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Khartoum's apparent concession is unconvincing. Hercules C-130 planes will be allowed to fly only one at a time and only until the end of July. Agaw insists that the Sudanese government's proposal that the World Food Programme's Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) — the principal source of relief aid for the south — rely on smaller aircraft and on road transport for food delivery could only be seen "as a deliberate policy to annihilate the people by starving them". Apart from the Hercules planes, the OLS has only two Indian light planes at the airport at Lokichokio, a Kenyan town 20 miles from the Sudanese border. "These light planes have the capacity to carry between seven and 12 people. How on earth would they be able to deliver food for the millions starving?" Agaw said.

Agaw rejected allegations that Hercules C-130 planes may have been used at any point to carry arms to the SPLA, saying that the Sudanese government has never been able to find any evidence to prove this. The SPLA is only supposed to provide protection for relief workers delivering supplies in SPLA-held territory, and Agaw insists that it is not involved in the distribution or administration of aid. "All the relief workers are foreign. They have sworn to keep out of the conflict and have no interest in arms delivery whatsoever," explained Agaw.

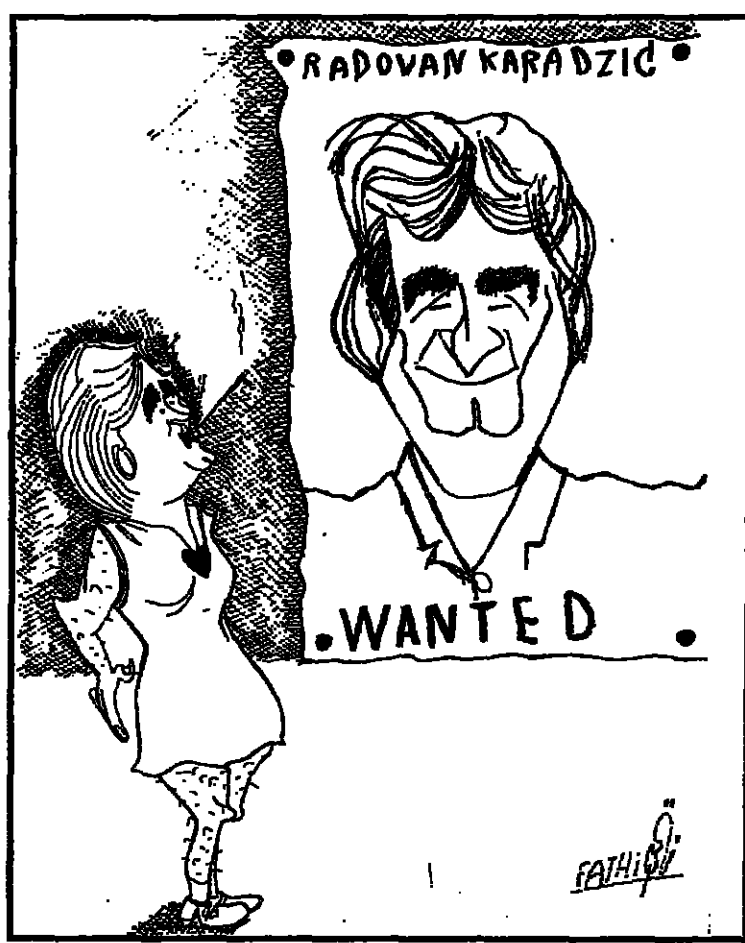
The most tragic situation of all, perhaps, results from the Sudanese government's prohibition of any relief aid reaching the millions of civilians living in areas which have an SPLA presence. In the western regions of Bahr Al-Ghazal and the Nuba mountains, many have died from hunger and hunger-related causes.

"Every day more and more people in the Nuba mountains die because the government refuses to allow a drop of aid to go in, in an attempt to annihilate them," Agaw said. The Nuba mountains is one of the SPLA's strongest bases and demands for autonomy there have been most rigorous. The Sudanese government blames rebel resistance for the peoples' suffering. The outcome of 13 years of sporadic fighting between Sudan's Arab north and Christian and animist south has forced many to leave their homes and seek refuge in the north or in camps run by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees — mostly found across the border in Uganda and Kenya.

"This constant insecurity, directly caused by government militia forces who raid and capture and kill, means that people can no longer lead normal lives. They are unable to cultivate land and feed themselves. Natural factors such as floods and droughts exacerbate the situation further," said Agaw, adding that forcing hunger upon the people has been one of the weapons used against the population of south Sudan throughout the war.

Soliman Bakheet, head of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) — the SPLA's political wing — in Egypt, told the *Weekly* that members of the Sudanese army and the Popular Defence Forces, the government-sponsored militias, have been regularly looting and burning relief supplies as well as harassing aid workers, making it impossible for them to distribute aid in certain areas. "The only way to stop the suffering is the imposition of strict international sanctions that would force the democratisation of the government in Sudan and force the authorities to assess their human rights record in the south," suggested Bakheet.

Former Sudanese Minister of National Guidance Mahgoub Osman also supports economic sanctions against the Sudanese government. Osman told the *Weekly* that the Sudanese opposition as well as the people in the south support sanctions, "since southerners could not be worse off than they are now. Sanctions will only affect the interests of the government. The people, be they in the north or in the south, have nothing more to lose. They have lost everything. The proof is the outbreak of famine."



Nicaraguan troops patrolling the border with Honduras mingle with villagers. Rearmed Contra troops are alleged to have kidnapped villagers and to have spirited them across the border into Honduras (photo: AFP)

## Colombia risks drug barons' wrath

This week, Colombia's President Ernesto Samper received death threats as he reopened the debate on permitting Colombian drug traffickers to stand trial in America. Can the cycle of violence in the South American nation be stemmed, wonders **Sayed Awad**

Colombia is one of the most violent countries in the world. A murder is committed there every 20 minutes. Official statistics for 1995 show that more than 21,000 people were killed in Colombia in violent incidents and car accidents. One of the most horrific examples of this phenomenon was a massacre which occurred last June in the northwestern city of Medellin, leaving 18 people dead and 10 wounded. The total amount of ransom money taken in Colombia reached \$2.8 million last year.

Colombia suffers from violence connected to hired killers, revolutionary Marxist groups and armed militias that work for drug barons. Murder, kidnapping and armed bank robbery have become independent industries. Severe violations of human rights by the police and armed forces in their raids on drug cartels add to the problem. The raids involve massive destruction of land where narcotic plants are grown and heavy-handed techniques. It is in this context that the nominal head of the Non-Aligned Movement, President Ernesto Samper of Colombia, has been hit by numerous death threats following his de-

cision to reopen the debate on allowing Colombian drug traffickers to stand trial in the United States. Suspected "extraditables" — as the drug traffickers who are wanted to stand trial in American courts are called in Colombia — are literally up in arms.

Colombia is not considered a major drug-producing country, but it is responsible for the preparation and smuggling of 80 per cent of the estimated \$10-12 billion worth of drugs that enter the United States and Canada each year. The cities of Medellin and Cali are the main centres for drug barons, who provide the Colombian economy with \$7 billion annually — more than the amount petrol brings in to the South American country.

The lucrative gains which can be made from the drug trade mean that hundreds of thousands of families plant more coca shrubs than any other crop. In order to protect the illegal industry, drug cartels have attracted more than 50,000 people into armed and organised militias that operate chiefly in the cities on the Caribbean coast. The cartels also control special assassination groups which mur-

der and kidnap politicians, media people, judges and labour union members. Drug dealers have been able to find protection from various sources. There are many government officials who benefit financially from the drug cartels, and whoever resists the temptation of drug money pays the price with his life or office.

The ability of the drug-smuggling networks to infiltrate police departments is well known. Their influence extends to important figures in the executive and parliament. In the country's biggest political scandal, drug dealers disclosed evidence that the current president of Colombia and his top assistants had made a deal with a gang in Cali, offering it millions of dollars to finance a 1994 presidential campaign in exchange for promises to be lenient in dealing with them and not to extradite them to the US. Since 1989, the drug barons have been waging a bloody war on the government which has led to the deaths of thousands of people and the destruction of the national economy.

Despite the demise of leftist groups in neighbouring countries, Colombia is still

home to a number of Marxist organisations. The Armed Revolutionary Forces, which date back to 1949, are still considered the biggest rebel organisation. It controls many areas and provides many Indian families with safe havens. The National Liberation Army, founded in 1960, specialises in exploding oil pipes, while the Simon Bolivar Group targets the governing political elite, the security forces, government centres, industry, big landowners and company executives, who they accuse of being supported by American imperialism. Both groups justify violence by saying that they want to change the social reality by directing a war against the state. Lately, a previously unknown organisation called Colombia's Dignity has appeared on the scene, claiming responsibility for the kidnapping of the president's brother because of his involvement in corruption.

The drug barons have manipulated anti-imperialist slogans as a cover for their activities. They provide leftist groups with financial backing in exchange for the latter's protection of the drug trade. The violent operations under-

taken by the leftist groups sometimes cover crimes committed by the drug dealers, a practice that prevents the government from concentrating its efforts on drug trafficking.

The US has recently threatened to impose economic sanctions against Colombia because of government leniency towards the drug cartels. But, in fact, the US and other countries of the North carry a double responsibility. On the one hand, they are the main centres for drug demand. On the other, they act to reduce the price of Southern countries' main income source — raw materials — and so weaken the economies of the Third World. Northern governments also ignore the money-laundering operations that convert illegal drug earnings into respectable bank account numbers in their countries. The amount of drug money laundered each year is estimated by experts at more than \$200 billion. Meanwhile, industrialised countries are the ones which control the arms trade that provides drug cartels and drug distribution networks with their weapons. The same nations also sell the chemical substances used in drug manufacturing.

## Americans anger their allies

CANADIAN officials cautiously welcomed United States President Bill Clinton's decision to freeze for six months the measure that allows Americans to sue foreign firms doing business with Cuba, reports **Dina Abdel-Hafeez**. The US had last week sanctioned a Canadian firm under the controversial Helms-Burton law, provoking threats of retaliation from America's allies, including Canada, Mexico and the European Union nations.

The Clinton administration last week informed nine executives working for the Canadian mining company Sheritt International that they were barred from visiting the US. Two of these executives are prominent British businessmen. The action meant that the Toronto-based company was the first to be sanctioned under the Helms-Burton law, which allows non-American companies that sell, buy or benefit from US property confiscated after Castro's revolution to be sued in American courts. Clinton passed the law in March, less than a month after Cuba shot down two American civilian airplanes.

The law includes terms denying US visas to foreign businessmen who "traffic" in US property which Castro's government nationalised after 1959.

While the US continues a trade embargo against Cuba, Canada, Mexico and Europe are of the opinion that by investing in the Caribbean nation, they are giving the Cuban government a chance to remain on the path to reform.

The decision to sanction the Canadian company caused tensions to rise between the US and some of its trading partners. The United Kingdom delivered a fiercely worded protest to the American State Department over what it called a "disgraceful and preposterous" blacklisting of the two British nationals, while Sir Leon Brittan, the EU's trade commissioner, denounced the law as "extraterritorial and expropriatory".

Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien authorised the preparation of retaliatory measures that would include allowing Canadians to sue any US company that uses the Helms-Burton law to attack Canadian companies doing business in Cuba. He also pledged to toughen federal law to protect Canadian firms.

"By penalising the investment interests of its closest allies, the US is damaging transatlantic relations and giving comfort to those who it seeks to challenge," said Ian Lang, British secretary of state for

trade and industry, in London. The British Foreign Office commented that the two British executives' business dealings were entirely legitimate in the eyes of the British, Canadian and Cuban governments. Lang told reporters, "This American action, which implies blackmail and forcing its foreign policies on its allies, is what angered Britain and Europe. Although we support the US's aim of bringing about democracy in Cuba, we reject the methods. It is one thing to want to punish the country directly, another to take an action against the companies of friendly powers that do not happen to share the American view." According to a US report, between 100 to 200 companies are operating in Cuba on confiscated property and thus risk having their top executives barred from the US. Four British firms have already stopped operations in Cuba and pulled out of the country.

Sheritt International is not the only company facing accusations in the US. A Mexican firm and an Italian one have been identified by the US State Department as committing the offence of "trafficking in confiscated US property in Cuba". Mexico has protested against the Helms-Burton law saying that

it violates the principles of the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Canada also intends to take the dispute to NAFTA. Canadian Trade Minister Art Eggleton said, "It's a radical piece of legislation. It needs to be rethought. Cooler heads need to prevail and, particularly when they get outside this election year, hopefully this will happen." It is acknowledged that during an election year in America, anti-Castro lobbies exert some influence.

President Clinton was last week engaged in a round of telephone calls to European leaders to try to ease allied concerns. Nevertheless, Clinton was unwilling to soften the legislation since he felt that such a move would weaken him against Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole, his rival in the November elections. By freezing the law, the US president has tried to steer a middle course between alienating the powerful voting bloc of almost one million Cuban Americans in south Florida and further infuriating key US allies.

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**





photo: Hassan Diah

# 'Suez is ours'

تأميم شركة قناة السويس

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سنة السيد المصطفى عليه السلام

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

نقل للدولة المالية من اموالها

تتضمن المادتين ١٤١ و ١٤٢ من قانون الانتخابات، حيث تنص المادة ١٤١ على أن:

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Source: *Front page on 21 July 1956: "The Suez Canal Company is nationalised"*

**Alexandria at the end of July is a holiday city, and, with its long palm-lined beaches, its brilliantly lit cafés and shops, a place of beauty and excitement. As Nasser made his way slowly along the sea road to Menshiyeh Square in an open air car, picked out by a spotlight in the following car, thousands of Alexandrians and visitors lined the streets to cheer him. There was an electric feeling in the atmosphere, as though people were all unconsciously preparing to be partakers in high drama. Nasser was caught up by the excitement of the adventure on which he and the whole of Egypt were soon to be launched. When he spoke to the Cabinet and the RCC he had been grim and unsmling. Now he was a different man, the popular leader, at one with his people, sharing their enthusiasm and showing that he shared it. [see photo above]**

Nasser had not prepared the speech he was going to make, but only made a few notes. He began by looking back at Egypt's history, at the way in which throughout the ages its people had been exploited by one tyranny or another, foreign or native-born. After he had been speaking for about half an hour he told his audience that Eugene Black had reminded him of how the Khedive Said had given out the contract for the canal. 'But,' he said, 'de Lesseps imposed conditions on the Khedive. I am not the Khedive, and I am not willing to accept conditions.' The code word had been given. Mahmoud Younis and his teams moved into action. 'Therefore,' Nasser went on, 'you should know of a decree that has been signed by the President of the Republic.

**Article 1. Compagnie Universelle du Canal Maritime de Suez shall be nationalised as an Egyptian company and transferred to the state with all its assets and commitments. Article 2. The administration of navigational traffic in the Suez Canal shall be taken over by an independent body.' There were four more brief articles filling in details.**

There was a moment of silent incredulity, as the significance of what they had just heard sank into the quarter of a million people crowded into Meshiyeh Square. Then pandemonium erupted and scenes of wild excitement broke out in towns and villages through the length and breadth of the land where millions had been clustered round their radios to listen to the President's speech. Nobody in Egypt slept much that night.

**(Mohamed Hassanein Helkal in Cutting the Lion's Tale: Suez Through Egyptian Eyes, Andre Deutsch Limited, 1986. Reproduced in Al-Ahram Weekly courtesy of the author.)**

# MOHAMED H. HEIKAL

**SUEZ**  
Through  
Egyptian Eyes

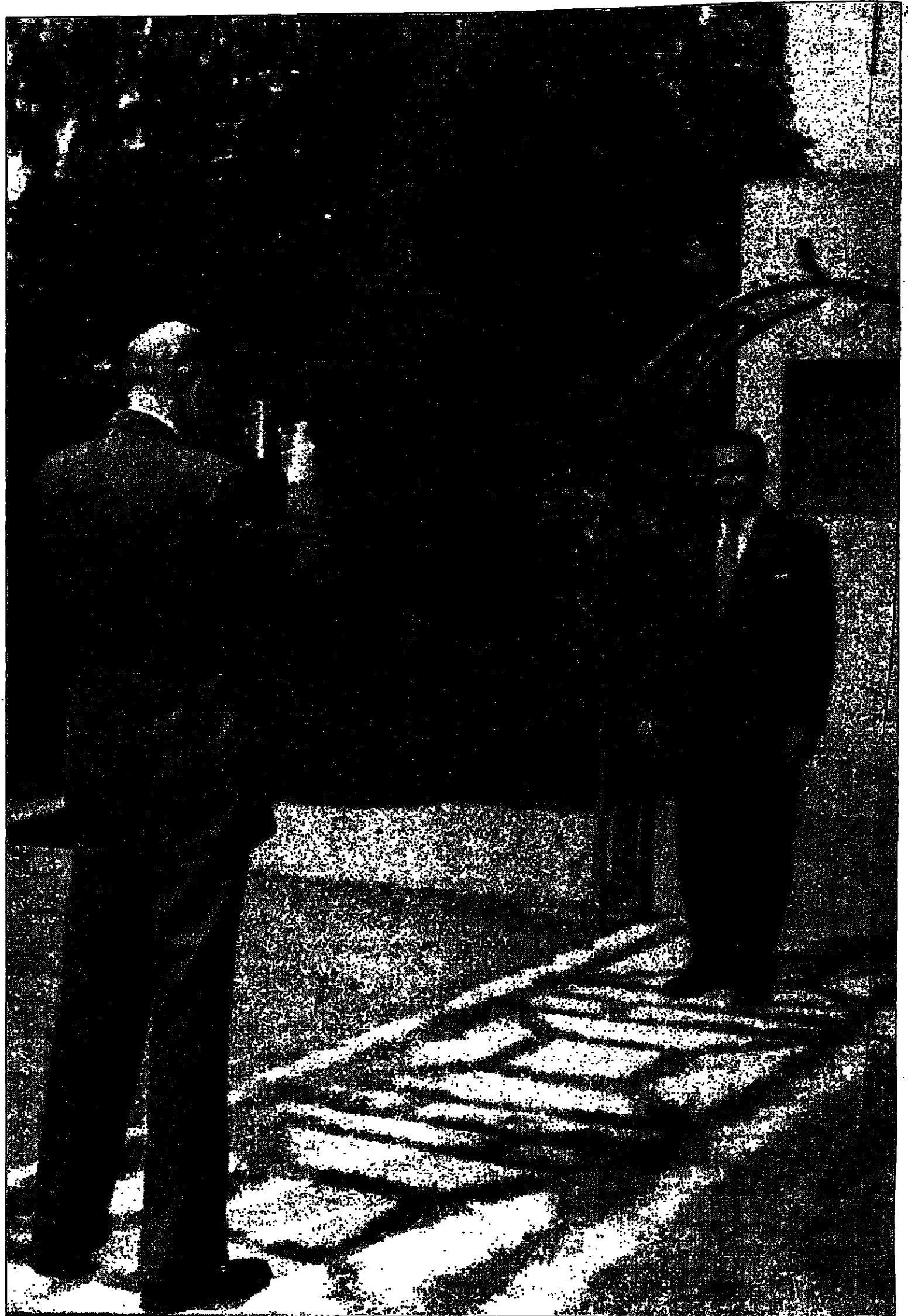




# Nasser's world scoop



America and its western allies were putting the squeeze on Egypt through the World Bank. Nasser struck back. Overnight he became the hero of the Arab and Third worlds, and the arch-enemy of the West. Fayza Hassan looks at those days' press, and on the opposite page, chronicles the Canal's turbulent history.



MEETINGS OF FOES: Nasser (top left) meets for the first and only time with Anthony Eden, who as British foreign secretary made a brief visit to Cairo in February 1955. In the photo above, Nasser is being filmed by World Bank president Eugene Black

photo: Hassan Diab

On 26 July 1956, in his famous speech delivered at Al-Manshiya Square in Alexandria to commemorate the fourth anniversary of King Farouk's ousting, Gamal Abdel-Nasser announced the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company. "Our wealth and our rights have been returned to us and Egypt will build the Aswan Dam with the support of her sons," he told a delirious crowd.

The move, which at first was interpreted as the angry reaction of a leader who had been slighted, had been in fact thoroughly prepared, with Egyptian personnel following a pre-determined scenario, ready to occupy simultaneously all the key positions in the company at Nasser's signal, a signal he gave towards the end of his speech.

The take-over was fully successful and the canal continued its operation in Egyptian hands without the slightest hiccup despite the West's predictions to the contrary. The Western powers never forgave Nasser for his boldness.

On the morning of 27 July, *Al-Ahram's* banner's echoed Nasser's cry. "Our wealth and our rights have been returned to us," they proclaimed. "The *Rays* Gamal Abdel-Nasser," read the lead article on the front page, "announced yesterday that our wealth and our rights have been returned to us, in the name of the nation. Egypt will build the Aswan Dam relying in the future on her sons, their unity and their blood. Furthermore, the leader of the revolution proclaimed during his speech at the popular rally in Alexandria that this great historical decision was his answer to the West's refusal to grant Egypt a loan to build the Aswan Dam. His answer was a presidential decree declaring the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company and the transfer of its assets, rights and liabilities, to the Egyptian people. He also announced the compensation of the company's shareholders at the share prices last quoted on the stock exchange, after freezing the company's assets in Egypt and abroad. While the great *Rays* was proclaiming the nationalisation decree, men from the Egyptian Canal Authority, which was taking over the company, were actually taking control of all the buildings and facilities belonging to the company."

The full transcript of Nasser's speech followed. The names of the new Egyptian key personnel for the management of the canal, as listed on the presidential decree appeared on the same front page: Mohamed Helmi

Baghat Badawi, director of the company; Mahmoud Younis, deputy director and representative of the Canal Authority; Badawi Ibrahim Hamouda, deputy of the authority's board; Ibrahim Zaki, representative of the Ministry of Irrigation and Public Works, topped the list.

Predictably, the foreign press was much less enthusiastic than *Al-Ahram* about the event. "Egypt nationalises Suez Canal; will use revenues to build Aswan Dam," read the banner of the *New York Times* dated 26 July.

This was sub-titled: "Nasser retaliates against the West's denial of aid — London stunned." The text which followed indicated how much London had been taken by surprise. "Prime Minister Eden conferred hurriedly earlier today with United States and French diplomats on Egypt's nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company. The news of the action by President Gamal Abdel-Nasser reached Sir Anthony last night in the middle of a dinner party he was giving for King Faisal of Iraq at 10 Downing Street, the prime minister's residence."

Sir Anthony immediately conferred with Selwyn Lloyd, British foreign secretary, and other cabinet ministers and service chiefs, present at the dinner. "Later he summoned Andrew Foster, United States chargé d'affaires, and Jean Chavanel, the French ambassador, to the conference at 10 Downing Street. The meeting was still in progress after 1.30 this morning. Eden had summoned many more advisers. Present at the meeting were Lloyd, Viscount Kilmer, the Lord Chancellor; the Earl of Home, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations and the Marquess of Salisbury, Lord President of the Council."

"President Nasser's action appeared to have been a stunning surprise to British officials," commented the *New York Times*, adding: "During that meeting the British could not come up with an immediate answer, but instead, decided that since it was the US actions that placed them in this situation the British felt that the United States must now stand firmly beside Britain in this crisis."

The Americans however, needed time as well to recover from their own surprise. Also on 27 July, the *New York Times* ran another article which said in substance under the headline: US and Allies Talk "Urgently" on Canal: "The State Department said today that the United States Government is consulting urgently with the other governments concerned" on the Egyptian nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company. The department said the action of President Gamal Abdel-Nasser "carries far reaching implications" and "affects the nations whose economies depend upon the products which move through this international waterway and the maritime countries as well as the owners of the company itself." A second item on the same day indicated that "Britain protested sharply to Egypt today against the nationalisation of the Suez Canal." Britain charged that Egypt's "arbitrary" action was "a serious threat to navigation."

According to the same article, a Cairo broadcast monitored in London, had announced that the Egyptian government had refused to accept the British protest note, together with a similar one sent by France. "Earlier, Prime Minister Eden told the House of Commons that the government had in mind a number of possible retaliatory measures, such as blocking Egypt's sterling balances," the ar-

ticle said.

Moreover, Eden had not ruled out a member's suggestions that warships could be sent to the canal terminuses under the nine-power Constantinople Convention of 1888, which pledged freedom of navigation of the canal in peace and war, concluded the article.

Nasser was quick to deliver his answer to these veiled threats. In Cairo, reports the *New York Times*, "Egypt announced that the Suez Canal had been put under martial law," and "any action aimed at harming the interests or property of the nationalised company or impeding traffic would be subject to the maximum penalty of the law."

French officials on the other hand, foresaw the possibility that the Egyptian seizure of the Suez Canal Company would be brought speedily before the United Nations Security Council or the International Court of Justice in The Hague, as reported in the French press of 27 July. Louis Joxe, secretary-general of the French Foreign Ministry, summoned his principal aides to a conference at the Quai d'Orsay, while Foreign Minister Christian Pineau told correspondents that the nationalisation action was "of a type that suggests Colonel Nasser is at bay." Pineau added that the Suez question "inevitably would loom large in the discussions he will have with Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd beginning Monday in London."

The move, commented one French journalist, took "the French Government and the canal company, which has its main offices in Paris, completely by surprise."

The rest of the world was also getting into the act. Prime Minister S W R D Bandaranaike in Co-

lombo, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), a member of the Colombo Powers, decided to consult the leaders of India, Pakistan, Burma and Indonesia about the situation arising from Egypt's decision to nationalise the Suez Canal. The Ceylonese premier, it was reported, believes that the Egyptian government-action has "many serious implications." He is of the opinion that immediate discussions among the powers closely connected with the issue are urgently needed to reach some friendly understanding.

"The Colombo Powers," comments the *New York Times* on 28 July, "constitute an influential section of the Asian-African bloc and also include three members of the British Commonwealth. Political circles believe they will be able to influence both Egypt and Britain in resolving the Suez dispute."

Meanwhile, Lord Killearn, former high commissioner and ambassador to Cairo and an old hand at using military might against Egyptian rulers, promoted his "five ways to beat Nasser" in the *Sunday Dispatch*. Lord Killearn suggested: 1) Re-occupation of the Suez Canal Zone, preferably with United States and French support; 2) Disruption of Egypt's use of the Nile for irrigation by manipulating water controls in Uganda, Ethiopia and the Sudan; 3) A pact with Israel; 4) Inducement of Moscow to cooperate in exercising pressure on Egypt and 5) "The diplomat's way", that is, reaffirmation of the Constantinople Convention of 1888 guaranteeing freedom of navigation through the canal.

On 29 July *Al-Ahram's* front page carried Abdel-Nasser's answer to the flurry of activity and veiled threats made in the US, England and France. "The *Rays* warns Britain and France," read the banner, "and places on their shoulders the responsibility of any disruption of the canal's navigation." Nasser's warning to the Western powers was that if they chose to use military action against Egypt, he would retaliate in kind. Egypt, he said, recognised the international character of the canal and guaranteed safe navigation to ships of all friendly nations. Egypt, however, was a sovereign country and would not tolerate any intervention in its affairs. Any action against its sovereign rights would be met with a very strong reaction.

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Pages of *Al-Ahram* and the *New York Times* on the days immediately following the nationalisation of the Suez Canal



# The longest shortcut



Britain, France and Israel reacted to the nationalisation by staging a tripartite aggression on Egypt. In the aftermath of the fiasco, the people of Port Said destroyed the statue of de Lesseps (top left), which marked the northern tip of the Canal. Above, Port Saidis flock around Nasser in a celebration of victory

*photo: Hassan Diab*

Conceived as a civil engineering exercise during the Napoleonic occupation of Egypt, pitting England, France and Turkey in a battle of wits, the Suez Canal, "the world's longest man-made short cut", was finally achieved by an unscrupulous retired French diplomat, to become the bone of contention which more than once changed the course of Egypt's history.

The idea of connecting the Mediterranean to the Red Sea has been an independent preoccupation throughout Egypt's history. The earliest recorded attempt was made by Necho (600 BC). The plan was to extend an earlier canal dug probably around 2000 BC from Lake Timsah to the Red Sea. This endeavour is reported by Herodotus: "This prince [Necho] first commenced that canal leading to the Red Sea, which Darius, king of Persia afterward continued. The length of this canal is equal to four days' voyage and it is wide enough to admit two triremes abreast. The waters enter it from the Nile, a little above the city of Bubastis. It terminates in the Red Sea, not far from Ptolemus, an Arabian town."

The canal ran roughly along the lines of the present-day sweet water canal from the Nile to the Bitter Lakes. Under the Ptolemies, an extension connected it to the Red Sea itself. This canal, known as Trajan's river (after Trajan who restored it in the second century AD, it having fallen into disrepair), did not seem to have remained navigable for long. Centuries later, the Arab conqueror Amir Ibn Al-'As joined the two seas by restoring the Trajan canal which he used to transport grain from Cairo to Suez and thence by the Red Sea to Arabia.

The question of bypassing the Nile and joining the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea by cutting a canal through the Isthmus of Suez also arose long before the 19th century. The Venetians suggested it in the 15th century in order to recover the trade they had lost to the Portuguese as a result of the discovery of the Cape route to India, but the Mamelukes, seeing no profit for Egypt in it, refused to finance the project. It was not until the French expedition in 1798, however, with Napoleon seeing in such a project a possible means of destroying British commercial supremacy, that the idea was considered again seriously. Bonaparte wanted to assure "the free and exclusive possession of the Red Sea to the French Republic." By 1802, Bonaparte's chief surveyor, miscalculating the length of the two seas, cast serious doubts on the feasibility of the undertaking. His views were not discarded until 1846 by the Société d'Etudes pour le Canal de Suez, by which time de Lesseps had come to the fore at the beginning of the Suez scheme.

Before the Napoleonic wars, Britain's pre-occupation with Egypt was mild, almost non-existent, if one discounts its interest in an overland route linking England with India. Travel between England and India was more often than not left to circumstances until 1840, when the question of the Suez connection was revived once more.<sup>1</sup>

The French, the British and the Ottomans engaged in a long and painful diplomatic battle, each party defending their own interests and sphere of influence. A railway link was preferred by the British and they offered to build it, while the canal was advocated by the

French. Apparently Mohamed Ali decided that he would have neither and nothing was heard until after his death in 1849.

Haggle between the powers was revived after the viceroy's death. It is then, writes John Marlowe, that the project captured the undivided attention of "a retired French diplomat, without money or influence, who had served in Egypt about 15 years previously." During the visit of a French mission to Egypt, St Siméon Prosper Enfantin strongly recommended the idea of the canal to Mohamed Ali. Ferdinand de Lesseps, following in Enfantin's steps, was to make it his *raison de vivre*.

After the death of Ibrahim, Mohammed Ali's son, Abbas was appointed regent for his grandfather Mohammed Ali. The British promptly put their idea of the railway to him, which by now had been developed to include a line from Cairo to Alexandria in addition to the one from Cairo to Suez. But Abbas had his own agenda, a programme of de-modernisation for Egypt. It took much patience and diplomacy to turn him around, then to win the approval of the Porte, but the British were desperate to stamp out French influence: they could not afford to miss this chance. "The involved themselves in so many intrigues," wrote a 1951 British official, "that they managed victorious having secured the railway 'firman'." Notwithstanding Abbas' death, the Cairo-Alexandria line was completed in 1855 and the Cairo-Suez line in 1858, Abbas' successor, Said, honoring his commitments. The railway was later extended to Upper Egypt and branch lines were constructed in the Delta. In 1855 the electric telegraph entered Egypt which by 1856 was linked to Europe by a submarine cable to Alexandria.

While Egypt was catching up with modern times, courtesy of London to best serve British interests, the idea of the canal had remained in abeyance. Only de Lesseps devoted his time to reviving the project.

Selesse devoted his usual working hours to the study of the Arabic language. Then the work changed, bringing good tidings to the Sephardim. In 1854 Said succeeded the Abbas. De Lesseps had befriended Said during his time as vice-consul in Egypt. A flat boy, Said had been put on a permanent diet in his childhood. It is said that De Lesseps had endeared himself to him by feeding him macaroni, which Said adored, every time he visited. Said did not forget his friend. Soon De Lesseps was in possession of a concession to "the exclusive rights to form and direct a compagnie universelle for the construction and operation of a canal through the Isthmus." The concession stated that the canal should be "a direct cut between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea and that a fresh-water canal should be dug from the Nile to the Suez Isthmus and then run parallel to the salt canal." Other points included provisions for "workmen, dues and a stipulation that the canal should be opened to ships of all nationalities. The concession was for 99 years with the stipulation that the company "would finance, construct and operate the canal, that the Egyptian government would provide such lands as might be required and would receive in return 15 per cent of the net profits." It was also provided that the concession would have to be ratified by the Sultan and De Lesseps was informed that the work would not be started until the authority of the Sublime Porte has been obtained," writes Madowe.

After a technical study was completed, the statutes of the company were published in 1856, fixing the capital at 200 million francs, divided into 400,000 shares of 500 francs each and providing that the head office of the company would be in France. In July 1856, adds Marlowe, "a secret agreement was arrived at between Said and (de) Lesseps and published in a vice-regal decree, providing that the Egyptian government would, after taking into account the seasonal requirements of Egyptian agriculture, supply all the labour required by the company, subject to the provision of accommodation and payment of fixed wages by the company."

This decree was to cause enormous controversy later because the workers had to be supplied by the system of the *corvée* (forced labour). Robert Solé, in his work of fiction *Le Semaphore d'Alcazaride* writes: "The victory was no longer willing to allow the company to mobilise thousands of felahs, but Ferdinand de Lesseps was strongly opposed to any modification of the accords concluded during the rule of Said Pasha." The narrative goes on to relate that the question was put to Napoleon III for arbitration...The emperor refused his aid... It was for the disorganisation of the company. To reduce the number of felahs, the company launched a vast recruitment operation for free workers [who came] from all the Mediterranean countries."

British reacted with polite disapproval to the news of the concession. The French, while approving, made a point of dissociating themselves officially from a project privately enterprised by one of their subjects. British and French traditional rivalry found plenty of opportunities to display itself, while de Lesseps exercised diplomacy on all fronts to allay fears and win allies, but to no avail: The British remained opposed, the French chilly and the banking world suspicious of de Lesseps and his project. As for the Sultan, he withheld his firm.

For all these reasons when de Lesseps arrived in Paris in the summer of 1858 to put out his Prospectus, opening a subscription list "he was met with resounding failure." Writing afterwards, he said: "Of the 220,000 shares allotted for French nationals, only 207,111 were taken up. Said cost 64,000 on behalf of the Egyptian Government. Of the balance of 116,000 shares, only 15,244 were subscribed. Relying on a verbal promise from a certain number of the holders of the unsold shares, de Lesseps immediately and haphazardly commencing to subscribe them to the viceroys, went ahead with the registration of the company with the French Ministry of Commerce and made the required declaration that his authorised capital had been fully subscribed. Founders' shares entitling the holders to 10 per cent of the net profits of the company were distributed to persons whose names were not divulged while de Lesseps pretended to act on special mandate from the viceroys, giving thus the company an appearance of political and financial backing that it

did not in fact possess."

De Lesseps went back to Egypt where Said had completely disassociated himself from the venture. The viceroy and the sultan — finally in agreement on the matter — forbade him to proceed. Ignoring them, de Lesseps announced the beginning of work on the canal on 25 April 1859. A deadlock developed. De Lesseps went to Paris to ask Napoleon III for help, appealing to Empress Eugénie, a distant relative of his.

Pressure was put on the Sultan by the representatives of the French emperor. The French, British and Turks used an opportunity to serve their own interests, besied themselves manipulating each other. No decision was forthcoming. De Lesseps took it upon himself to ignore once more the protagonists who had been pitted against each other on his account and proceeded slowly with the work on the canal. But he encountered more problems than even he had expected: the *corvée* labour, the sweet water canal that the company was to be digging (the Nile valley, the Nile and the Red Sea), the local consociates of land and water, the French next to this canal, and finally the refusal of the Porte to grant the firm an — all these had become obstacles which delayed any significant progress.

Once again death was to help de Lesseups out of his predicament. Said died in 1863. He was succeeded by Ismail, oldest surviving son of Ibrahim. De Lesseups was once again launched on his path to glory as Ismail's reign introduced the last and successful episode in the canal saga. The canal had taken 15 years from concession to completion. Now it needed a grand opening. Khedive Ismail made sure that the festivities commemorating the momentous event would go down in the history of Egypt as among the most splendid on record.

Eugenie, empress of the French, Franz Joseph, emperor of Austria, the crown prince of Prussia, the prince and princess of Holland among other lesser royal figures were to grace simultaneously an event which came to shine with the radiance of a myth. Ibsen had come from Norway, Egyptologists Lepsius and Dümichen from Germany, the mayor of Manchester and the presidents of the Birmingham and Glasgow chambers of commerce came from Britain.

The khedive had chosen 100 most distinguished figures from among the 900 guests to honour them

**specially with a tour of Upper Egypt.**

Back from their excursion, the party, with the rest of the guests, attended in Cairo the opening of the new opera. Aida, the opera on a Pharaonic theme commissioned to Giuseppe Verdi, was not ready in time and Rigoletto was performed instead. On another evening, Ismail regaled his guests with the spectacle of the Pyramids lighted with magnesium flares. Eugénie de Montijo, Napoleon III's wife and de Lesseps' many times removed cousin, was Ismail's most prized guest. He had honoured her with a palace specially built for her on Gezira island, decorated in "Oriental-Victorian" style, complete with marble statues, wrought iron and satin covered chairs.

Wijn and van Saurenbroeck. The two ships were commercial vessels, the *Khedive* owned by the Egyptian Government and the *Mafrousse*, owned by the French. According to Port Said on his yacht the *Mahroussa*, accompanied by the minister of the interior, Sherif Pasha, and the Prime Minister Nubar Pasha. The prince and princess of Hoffs arrived on the *SS Valk*. A storm off the coast of Jaffa threatened to delay Emperor Franz Joseph who had been visiting the holy shrines in Palestine. Defying the threat however, the *SS Grief* arrived on 16 September in Port Said. The *Mafrousse* and the empress of the French. The crown prince of Prussia sailed in at the same moment to witness the arrival of the Aigle, the paddle wheel steamer which was conveying the empress from Alexandria. Five British flagships were the first to salute her, followed by ships of other nationalities taking up the greeting with a cannonade which is said to have lasted an hour. The empress stood in a saloon ship on an awning on the quarter deck. The salute from many of the ships was answered by 12 British, eight German, The Dutch, Spanish, Swedish and Russians had two ships each and the Danes one. Besides the navies there were commercial steamers — French, Italian, Austrian and British.

The sun, however, refused to shine on the opening; rain had been falling for eight hours. Pavilions had been erected to receive the dignitaries who were disembarking. The first to walk on the wooden plankers were the princess of Holland and her escort, Prince Tawfik, the khedive's heir. Then came Empress Eugénie, wearing a plain lavender silk dress and a black hat, with a black plume. A black spotted veil half hid her face. Around her neck, she wore a simple locket. She walked down on the arm of the Austrian emperor, clad in a white tunic, scarlet trousers and a cocked hat. The khedive was positively shining in a blue uniform with gold lace and broad green ribbons. A scimitar with a gem studded hilt completed his royal attire. This was his moment of ultimate glory, a moment he paid for dearly, mainly with borrowed money, plunging his country into a financial chaos which was to take a century to clear.

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**Port Said: The Suez Canal Company building, 1956**



# They saw it happen

"In the name of the people, the Suez Canal Company shall be nationalised". Recordings of Nasser's fateful words continue to trigger a flutter of excitement in the hearts of millions of Egyptians. **Dina Ezzat** sought recollections of the day from people who were on hand to see, and join in, as history was being made



Kamal El-Din Hussein



Amin Howeidy



Ezzat Adel

## Entering the lion's den

IT WAS 48 hours before the nationalisation that I was told I had to participate in the takeover.

I was working in the petroleum industry. My boss, Mahmoud Younis, brought me into his office together with another colleague, Abdel-Hamid Abu Bakr, locked the door and threw the news in our faces.

It was stunning. We were so completely taken aback that a fair amount of time elapsed before any of us uttered a single word in response.

During the previous couple of days, Younis had been doing things that were completely out of character for him. On 23 July, President Nasser marked the fourth anniversary of the revolution by inaugurating a new pipeline to take oil from Suez to Cairo. From that time on Younis was not himself.

He would come in late for work, disappear without telling us where he was. He was absent-minded. He would take us in the evening in his car and drive us around town for hours. But we never thought that behind that mood was such massive news.

We knew that for the West the canal was more than a vital naval route. It was an economic asset. We knew that it was in the interest of the West to maintain control over the canal.

Then Younis had to break the silence. He told us that it was top secret and that we were not allowed to break the news to anyone.

It was a dilemma. We had no information on the canal. Yes, we knew a few things, but these were only guidelines. We needed details. We could not ask questions to avoid drawing attention to the matter. If anything had been leaked the nationalisation would have failed.

It was a very difficult situation. It was like entering a lion's den. We ended up getting a large number of books. But we could not take these massive volumes home lest we attracted any attention. We also could not stay long hours at the office because we had to act normal to avoid our families realising that something was afoot. We kept saying, "But what if we fail? What if it doesn't work out? What will become of Egypt?"

So Younis firmly put an end to this mood. He told us that we had to come up with a plan for Nasser to review and approve as soon as possible. He told us that we had to nominate people for the task. He told us that Nasser would announce the news in his speech in 48 hours' time and that we had to act fast.

And indeed we did. We chose a number of people; some were from the army, others were civilians. They included engineers, economists, legal experts and others. But we never told them anything and they never knew each other until hours before the operation was carried out.

Then we told each one of them that they had to be ready to leave at short notice to the desert for a secret mission and that they should not under any circumstances reveal this news to anyone.

When they met for the first time to learn of the task they were assigned, we were in Al-Galaa Camp in Ismailia. Some of them, I must say, were completely taken aback. Some were terrified. Others wanted to walk out. But everything was contained.

In that camp there were about 20 people. Some of us stayed in Ismailia where the main headquarters of the Suez Canal Authority was situated. Another group went to Suez where there were other offices. A third group went to the offices in Port Said. In Cairo there were two people assigned to the Garden City office of the Suez Canal administration.

The arrangement was that every member of the four groups would listen to Nasser's speech on the radio, and when they heard him say the word "de Lesseps" they would enter the offices and enforce the nationalisation.

Nasser must have been very worried that something might go wrong if we did not take notice of him saying "de Lesseps". So he repeated it several times and then he said the memorable words: "In the name of the people I declare the nationalisation of the Suez Canal."

Thank God everything went alright. There was no violence involved. It was euphoric. We were in the offices enforcing the nationalisation when people took to the streets declaring their support. We could hear them singing, "We nationalised the canal."

But the nationalisation was not just about one day's work. Later there was the task of keeping the canal functioning. The Egyptians working in the canal were not experienced enough to operate it. Things were particularly tough after the foreign company withdrew its staff. Luckily, seven seasoned navigators and engineers — who were Greeks — stayed on and trained the Egyptian staff.

I know that some people criticised the nationalisation because of the subsequent tripartite aggression. But I want to say for the record that the foreign company knew that it was supposed to leave the canal in 12 years so it did not invest at all in maintenance or upgrading.

If we had not nationalised the canal then, we would have received a junk navigation route in 1968 (the expiry of the concession lease). We just had to do it.

**Ezzat Adel**  
Former chairman of the Suez Canal Authority and member of the canal nationalisation task-force.



Mahmoud Amin El-Alem



Amina Shafiq



Ma'moun El-Hodeibi

## Against all odds

A CALL from Nasser brought the news to me 24 hours before the nationalisation. He asked me, "Kamal what do you think will happen if we nationalised the Suez canal? Do you think we should nationalise it?"

My response was spontaneous. I did not think twice. Immediately, I told him let's go ahead. There was no hesitation.

The canal is ours. We always knew that it was dug with Egyptian blood and sweat. It belonged to us and we had every right to control it.

We wanted to build the High Dam. We had to build the High Dam. Egypt wanted to expand its agricultural zone. We wanted to modernise our industries. For this we needed water. We needed water to irrigate the fields and we needed water to generate electricity.

The nationalisation led to the construction of the High Dam and the High Dam opened the door for development.

I clearly remember that shortly before the nationalisation decision was made, an English diplomat serving in Cairo visited Israel and met with Ben Gurion to discuss Nasser. Ben Gurion asked the British official: "What is that Nasser thinking about Israel?"

When the diplomat responded that Nasser is not thinking anything about Israel at the moment because he wants to focus on development

first, Ben Gurion told him: "This is the worst news I have heard".

I thought about this when Nasser was telling me that he was going to nationalise the Suez Canal.

The nationalisation was one of Nasser's most daring decisions. On that day, Nasser stood against all odds.

We all wanted to see the canal nationalised. We all believed that it would be silly to wait for 1968 — the due date for the return of the canal to Egypt [under the concession agreement]. Why waste 10 years? Also we never really had any guarantee that the foreign company would stick to the commitment and hand over the canal on the due date.

When Nasser and I spoke on the phone we did not articulate these ideas in so many words because we knew them.

The nationalisation was really a good decision. Those who lived through it can never forget the glory that came to Nasser during that time.

It was a really glorious moment in history for Nasser.

The nationalisation was not just about the building of the High Dam; it was also about national pride. We were talking about liberation; and the nationalisation completed this liberation.

When Nasser nationalised the canal he rejected all attempts by the West to humiliate Egypt.

The joy we felt — everyone of us, every Egyptian — when the na-

tionalisation was declared was beyond words.

In his speech in Alexandria, Nasser said, "In the name of the people I declare the nationalisation of the Suez Canal". At that moment Nasser was everyone of us.

Of course there were the concerns about the West's reaction. Nasser assigned to me the task of forming the national liberation army to make sure that any attack would be responded to promptly.

Of course there was the tripartite aggression in October as a reaction from the Western forces to the nationalisation. Yes, this is all true. But there was no other alternative. And the people shared these feelings. They were joyous over the nationalisation and they were saying we will go to war if we have to. I know that some people said that the nationalisation was a miscalculated move, but they are simply wrong.

And in face of everything, Nasser never lost his poise. He reversed me should not have done this. And the people were behind Nasser.

It is fascinating that I do not remember where I was when I got that call from Nasser. I do not remember where I was when he declared the nationalisation. I remember no details. All I remember is his voice in the phone telling me the news. And his voice declaring the nationalisation.

**Kamal El-Din Hussein**  
Member of the Revolution Command Council

## A master stroke

AT THAT time I was still a student doing my summer internship in *Al-Gil* (the generation) magazine.

We used to gather in the hallway next to the news room of *Akher Sa'a* magazine to listen to Nasser's speeches because we did not have a radio in our news room and portable radios were rare at the time.

Listening to Nasser's speeches, especially those on 22 and 26 July were always a must.

But that year his speech was different. It was not the usual about the march towards development and increasing the national income.

From the beginning Nasser focused on the issue of building the High Dam. In his charismatic way he told the story of Western attempts to abort Egypt's plans to build the dam which was meant to boost both industry and agriculture. His narration was so dramatic; his voice rose in pitch.

So when he said his famous words: "In the name of the people I nationalise the Suez Canal" we were all ready to hear it and be thrilled with it.

Yet at the same time, we were all dumb-struck. It was most unexpected. It took us a while to actually react.

My first response was to pick up the phone and tell my family the news in case they had missed it.

I spoke with my illiterate grandfather who kept asking me if nationalisation means the canal belongs to Egypt.

On my way back home I rode on two buses. And on both buses people were talking about nothing else but the nationalisation. I heard women ululating on the buses.

On the bus, on the street, and back home there was one phrase repeated over and over again by everyone: "It was a *darbat me'alem*, a master stroke."

The following day I was in Port Said. The city did not sleep. Literally. For months, there was so much joy. But also there was so much action. Egyptian staff was coming in to replace the outgoing foreign staff of the canal.

And when the tripartite aggression hit, people stood up against it. It was clear where that was coming from. People knew that Egypt was paying the price for standing up in the face of the imperial Western forces.

But everyone still believed that the nationalisation was a *darbat me'alem*.

**Amina Shafiq**  
Member of the council of the press syndicate and senior editor at Al-Ahram.

## United we stood

I WAS at home listening carefully to Abdel-Nasser's speech and I had a feeling something was in the making. I felt it in the air that something was going to happen on that day.

It was obvious from a speech that Nasser made after the US withdrew its promises to support Egypt in building the High Dam. He did not say anything in that speech, but I could feel it from his words and the tone of his voice that he had a plan in mind.

Nasser had so much pride, so it would have been very unlikely him not to react. Then when he said it, in his 26 July speech, I was so thrilled.

The nationalisation of the Suez Canal has been on the platform of the Egyptian Communist Party since the early 1920s. It was a wish held by every Egyptian. So when Nasser announced it, there was an overall emotional upheaval across the nation.

Before the nationalisation I was one of Nasser's opponents. I was opposed to the non-democratic approach of what I

thought was more of a coup d'etat than a revolution.

The nationalisation was a symbol of full liberation and it melted the ice between Nasser and the communists and the other forces of the left. We all stood together in a terrific manifestation of national unity. We had a feeling that we were walking into an overall confrontation with the Western imperialist forces and that we all had to be united.

Following the nationalisation, democracy was in full swing in Egypt. That was about the only time when the Egyptian Communist Party was allowed to publicly distribute its leaflets on the streets. It was a memorable time of cautious joy and joint struggle.

I remember setting up a headquarters to recruit volunteers to join the ranks of national liberation forces. I remember building contacts with residents of Port Said to gather information and send it to the official side.

And when the tripartite aggression hit, we were all there for each other.

**Mahmoud Amin El-Alem**  
Writer and literary critic



The battle for Suez had to be fought over and over again. Nasser at the front in 1968

photo: Hassan Diab

## It could've waited

THE NATIONALISATION of the Suez Canal was a dear wish to the heart of every Egyptian. It really meant a lot for every Egyptian to see the canal run and administered by Egyptians. The canal is a part of Egypt and no Egyptian would ever agree to see it under the control of a foreign body.

I was in Gaza when Nasser declared the nationalisation. At the time the radio waves did not reach Gaza. So I did not hear the news first hand.

It was on the evening of the day of nationalisation that the news started to spread. I was completely astounded I did not believe it. At first there was uncertainty. But everyone was talking about it.

The following morning it became a certainty, and all Egyptians were so happy. There is no doubt about it.

But some people, whose reaction went beyond the mere euphoria over the development, were apprehensive. Nobody questioned the nationalisation act as such, but some indeed were concerned about the way it happened.

I do not think that we were well prepared for it. There were concerns of retaliatory actions by the Western powers and it happened. It happened at a time when we were not prepared enough for it.

Personally, I was so shocked to hear Nasser, in one speech that he made in 1965, saying that at the time the canal was nationalised Egypt had not yet trained even one single battalion to use the arms imported from Czechoslovakia. In other words we went along with the nationalisation scheme at a time when our army's combat readiness was questionable.

So, one cannot help but wonder: Could it not have waited for another year when the army would have been in a better shape?

Yes, it was a great move on the road of liberation that was greatly welcomed not only in Egypt but across the Arab world and Africa where the anti-imperialism trend was on the rise.

I am not at all underestimating the historic value of the nationalisation, but I just think it was miscalculated.

**Ma'moun El-Hodeibi**  
Spokesman for the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood.

## Thrilling shock

I WAS in my office in Cairo, listening to Nasser's speech in Alexandria on the radio. And all of a sudden I heard him saying, "In the name of the people I declare the nationalisation of the Suez Canal."

I did not believe it. I just could not. It was a complete shock, a thrilling one. But the reaction of the people listening to his speech in Manshiya Square (Alexandria) made me realise that it was all true.

At the time I was working as commander of the Cairo military zone and I had not heard one word about it before. It was a closely guarded secret until the last minute. But I must say it took a while for the news to sink in.

Then my telephone rang. My wife was on the other end of the line. She was not calling to break the news, because when Nasser made a speech, the whole nation, actually all of the Arab world, listened to him. She was calling to express her delight. She was really happy. I was very happy, too.

We almost wept for joy as we talked on the phone.

But there was not much time for emotion. I had to attend to my duty to secure Cairo against any possible retaliatory attack from the West. We had to make sure that the entire city was secure and that there were enough supplies for emergencies.

The day of the nationalisation was a big day in the life of all Egyptians. I really saw the entire nation taking to the streets. There were men, women and children. They were all expressing their support for Nasser and the revolution.

The nationalisation was one of Nasser's incisive moves against the imperialism. West and it paved the way for the full liberation of Egypt. On that day he was the hero of the entire nation.

**Amin Howeidy**  
former minister of defence and former chief of the Intelligence Service.

## 'We felt so proud'

I WAS not listening to the speech by Nasser on the radio because I was on my way to the train station to buy a ticket to Cairo. I was working as a school teacher in Alexandria. And that was the time for summer holidays so I wanted to visit my family in Cairo.

I thought that during Nasser's speech was a good time to go buy the ticket because when Nasser spoke everybody listened. Really, there is no exaggeration there. Especially at that time.

I was on the street and all of a sudden people swarmed all around me. There were so many of them. It was unbelievable.

They were shouting Nasser's name.

Initially, I did not know what was going on. I thought there was an attempt to assassinate the president.

But it did not take me very long to realise what was going on: the Suez Canal was nationalised.

I must say I completely forgot about the holiday for that day. It did not look like a good day to try and travel to Cairo.

Everybody was so happy. It was really a memorable day.

It is almost as memorable as the day of the revolution. People were in tears really. We felt so proud.

**Soad Ali**  
A retired school teacher.



# ASEAN musings

How is it that ASEAN has emerged as the unrivalled showcase for Third World development, asks Gamal Nkrumah

Last weekend, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) concluded its annual ministerial meeting in the Indonesian capital Jakarta. Typically unceremonious and businesslike, the meeting stood in sharp contrast to other similar gatherings of Third World leaders insofar as having clearly defined goals and forward-looking strategic judgement. There is also a difference in perception about what a regional economic grouping is actually about. ASEAN's internationally acclaimed performance and prestige make it a far cry from the Organisation of African Unity, the Arab League and even the South Asia Regional Cooperation Council. ASEAN is the fourth largest trading partner after the United States, Japan and the European Union. ASEAN's exports and imports now have a combined total value of \$700 billion annually.

Whichever way we in the Third World turn — and we, or more precisely our leaders, have turned in a good number of conflicting directions since gaining independence from European colonial powers in the fifties and sixties — it seems that we can do little right on the economic front. The notable exceptions to our predicament have been the South East Asian tiger economies of ASEAN. Why? Between 1965 and 1995, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand grew at an average rate of seven per cent per annum — a rate well above the world average of around 3.5 per cent during the past three decades. Meanwhile, the Jakarta-based ASEAN secretariat disclosed that the current account deficits of the organisation's member-states decreased from \$11.4 billion in 1995 to \$4.2 billion

in 1996. Projected collective ASEAN export growth rates for 1996 were estimated to total 16 per cent, bringing the total value of exports to \$350 billion.

The so-called free market development of ASEAN tiger economies seemed in the 1960s to be a gamble fraught with risks. Yet there is no getting around the fact that ASEAN's economic miracle was an inspiring success story. Yes, we can grumble about ruthless authoritarian regimes, regimental societies, exploitative labour laws and the stifling of civil liberties. But whatever the shortcomings, ASEAN today fares far better than any other region in the Third World. In fact its emerging markets do not, strictly speaking, need to be lumbered with the lowly international status that is associated with the pejorative term "Third World" any more.

The tiger economies of South East Asia are often cited as exemplary models of free market or capitalist development. But what is often overlooked is that ASEAN's governments — read the state or public sector — played a central and critical role in energising the economies of the region. So contrary to common preconceived ideas, ASEAN's development could just as well be seen as a model of planned economic development.

What is unique about South East Asia, it is often said, is the way in which the political leadership worked hand in hand with entrepreneurs, both foreign and local. In other regions of the South, most notably Africa, South Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, it almost appears as if governments have conspired to thwart the emergence of an en-

trepreneurial class — and in particular one that is interested in productive, as opposed to unproductive, commercial ventures. The share of manufacturing production in the economies of ASEAN has been rising dramatically over the past few decades. Manufacturing now constitutes on average between 25 and 33 per cent of the gross domestic product in ASEAN's economies. They are no longer closed economies that are dependent on the export of primary raw materials. The tiger economies, unlike African, Latin American and Middle Eastern developing economies, are today open export-oriented manufacturing economies. So where have the rest of the developing nations of the South gone wrong? Why has ASEAN succeeded where others failed?

There are no readily available answers. Yes, there are many theories flying about. And perhaps the most important pointers stress political stability, high average savings rates and large investment in manpower, technical training and the education of women. Direct and indirect American investment in the region, which was designed to contain the spread of communism, also played an important part and must not be underestimated. The US not only pumped vast sums into non-communist South East Asia, it also transferred valuable technology to the region.

The war was lost in Vietnam, but American intervention in Vietnam did stem the tide of communism in South East Asia in the 1960s and '70s. While other regions of the Third World struggled to ensure their security by expending their defence budgets and ruining their economies in the process, South

East Asia, with its reliance on the American security umbrella, was shielded from the worst effects of the terrible drain on resources that the arms build-up in other regions of the South entailed. Today, Vietnam is the seventh and latest addition to the ASEAN family.

South East Asia undeniably had a head start in development. Pragmatic is a word many in the West, and increasingly many more in the Third World, associate with "good governance". Strong and long-lasting is an expression frowned upon in the West. Pragmatism, a hallmark of ASEAN, is characteristically used as a euphemism for the practices of authoritarian regimes. South East Asian leaders are characteristically pragmatic. A case in point is Indonesia's strongman, President Suharto. After a quick trip to Europe recently for a thorough medical check-up, German cardiologists produced a clean bill of health and pronounced the septuagenarian fit to rule a nation of 200 million. He supervised Indonesia's transformation from one of the poorest Third World nations into a promising emerging market.

South East Asia has powerful, and authoritarian, leaders like Indonesia's Suharto and Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew, former premier and now senior minister, who have shunned the populist rhetoric of revolutionary Third World leaders such as Indonesia's first president, Ahmed Sukarno. "The contrast between the policies of [former President] Sukarno and President Suharto in Indonesia is only the clearest example of a more general regional phenomenon. This is a phenomenon that was and will

remain a basic factor in the success of South East Asia countries," Professor S Jayakumar, the Singaporean minister of foreign affairs, noted at a lecture delivered at America's Georgetown University in April this year.

What sort of "phenomenon" did Jayakumar mean? Simply put, it is a question of social cohesion, political stability and economic viability. "South East Asian governments have been successful in creating a degree of social cohesion and political stability essential for economic development. This has reinforced development which in turn has reinforced social cohesion," Jayakumar noted.

The ASEAN experience is unique in many ways. ASEAN, alone among the regional economic and political groupings of the Third World, is an organisation that functions well. ASEAN is taken seriously both by its member states and by outsiders. Indeed, as Jayakumar stated, ASEAN "is a way of calculating and defining national interest. The measure of regional cooperation in South East Asia cannot be merely the number of projects agreed and implemented. For each ASEAN member, the 'ASEAN factor' is a necessary and real element in the calculation of national interest. The weight of this intangible factor may have varied from issue to issue and over time. But it has never been entirely absent. ASEAN cooperation has not erased the old patterns of competition and conflict. But it has significantly controlled them and made them less dangerous and less relevant to day-to-day interactions."

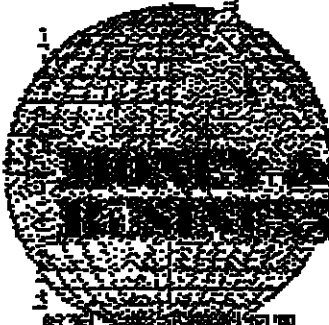
Such a situation is yet to appear in Africa, South Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

## Small business loans in Borg El-Arab

WITH THE aim of encouraging investment and development, the Social Development Fund signed a contract with the Borg El-Arab Investor's Association to allocate LE24mn in loans for small investors within the city. Mohamed Farag Amer, head of the association, said the loans will be used to set up workshops and small factories that will operate as feeder industries.

In addition, seven per cent of these loans (approx. LE1.2mn) will be earmarked for building a permanent headquarters of the association.

## MONEY & BUSINESS



## Trade fairs: an important tool for boosting exports

A DELEGATION from the Japanese Relief Organisation was received by Rushdi Saqr, head of the International Marketing and Fairs Organisation. Preliminary agreements have been made to study the possibility of Japanese grants being used to further enhance the fairgrounds at Nasr City with the construction of a conference hall and exhibition halls. Additionally, Egypt is expected to participate in a number of trade fairs due to take place in Japan during the forthcoming year.

Ahmed El-Gowelli, minister of the economy and cooperation, was keen to point out the special role that the fairs organisation has to play in raising the level of Egyptian exports and thus realise substantial growth in the national economy. He expressed the need to encourage manufacturers to participate in trade fairs overseas.

Gowelli also stressed the importance of maintaining a balance between imports and exports to African countries, saying that Egyptian exports to African countries must be increased.

## The first Egyptian-Palestinian advertising company

Ibrahim Nafie, chairman and editor-in-chief of Al-Ahram, Mohamed Rashid, President Arafat's economic advisor and Khaled Al-Usaili signing the contract. Attending the signing were also Adel Affi, general manager of advertising and member of the board of Al-Ahram



After signing the agreement, Ibrahim Nafie shakes hands with George Bantos. Next to him is Adel Affi and Mustafa Al-Bortakali



PRESIDENT Yasser Arafat hailed the idea put forward by his advisors who suggested the establishment of the first Palestinian-Egyptian advertising company. Al-Ahram was chosen as the Egyptian partner. Ibrahim Nafie, chairman and editor-in-chief of Al-Ahram, representing the Egyptian side, signed the contract with Mohamed Al-Rashid, President Arafat's economic advisor who represented the Palestinian Company for Commercial Services, which is a governmental company. Khaled Al-Usaili, who represented the

Palestinian private sector, also signed the contract with Mustafa El-Bortakali, Al-Ahram's legal advisor who attended the signing of the agreement. Also attending the signing were Adel Mohamed Affi, general manager of the advertising department and member of the board of Al-Ahram, George Bantos, regional manager of Philip Morris and duty free shops in Palestine, Jordan and Egypt. George Bantos is also a

board member of the Palestinian Tobacco Corporation.

The project was studied carefully by all sides before signing the contract.

The new company, which will be based in Gaza, will undertake publishing, printing, marketing and distribution activities. The head office will be located in Ramallah. Other branches will be opened throughout Palestine.

The new company will also carry out advertising campaigns of major international companies in the Far East, Europe and the

United States. Cooperation will be forged with all advertising agencies worldwide to promote their activities in Gaza and the West Bank.

The Palestinian staff in the company will be trained at Al-Ahram. Al-Ahram's workshops in Qalyub will provide all the needs of companies and clients, capitalising on the potentials of the big studio of Al-Ahram/Pyramids Advertising Agency.

Al-Ahram will provide all its potentials and expertise to back up the forthcoming project.

## Symposium discussed development in Assiut

MORE THAN 300 businessmen, investors, doctors and pharmacists attended a recent symposium on development at the invitation of Mohamed Raga El-Tahlawi, governor of Assiut. Participating in the symposium were delegations from USAID, the Insurance Risk Guarantee Company, the Ministry of Economy and International Cooperation, and the Department of Commerce of the American Embassy. Besides industrial development, El-Tahlawi expressed the desire to establish medical clinics, pharmacies and hospitals in the govern-

orate, which, while increasing the level of services would also serve as places of employment for graduates of medical, pharmacy and nursing schools. In order to implement this strategy, the Insurance Risk Guarantee Company, said that the company would serve to guarantee loans for doctors and clinics. Banks would supply the loans, to establish and equip small clinics, which the company would guarantee an amount ranging from 65 to 80 per cent of the value of the loan. A spokesman for USAID

shed light on an import programme for the private sector which the agency would finance, and explained how investors and workers would benefit from such a programme. The spokesman explained that the programme would grant special loans, the minimum being \$10 thousand and the maximum \$15 million, under the auspices of 20 different banks. A spokesman for the commercial attaché at the American Embassy stated that further information on these and other programmes would be available from the Egyptian Investment Association.

## NBE's leading role in boosting small-scale enterprises

THE NATIONAL Bank of Egypt (NBE) has carved a pivotal role in enhancing the economic reform policy and mitigating its negative social repercussions. To this end, NBE tailored an integrated programme for financing small-scale industries and enterprises.

It is noteworthy that the bank has — since the mid-60s — embarked upon financing small-scale productive enterprises through soft loans. In October 1990, NBE allocated a tranche of LE25mn (which has increased to LE315mn in April 1996) to expand the scope of activities to cover 23,000 tradesmen, graduates and cooperatives.

As an active credit channel, NBE has effectively participated in the Social Fund for Development's (SFD) programme to encourage young graduates and small entrepreneurs.

In May 1993, the bank signed six contracts with the SFD amounting to LE250mn, to be channelled to such entrepreneurs at concessional terms. In April 1996, 13,000 customers benefited

from such loans (including 5,840 existing facilities and 7,163 new ones). Under the above-mentioned facilities, NBE contributed to creating job opportunities for young graduates through movable marketing outlets.

The bank has also concluded with the Ministry of Trade and the SFD, and LE40mn contract to be implemented in four successive stages. The contract provides for establishing 2,000 marketing and service projects creating 4,000 and 2,000 permanent and temporary job opportunities respectively. In fact, the bank has already financed 161 projects amounting to LE4mn, as of April 1996.

Furthermore, NBE has concerted in cooperation with the Ministry of Industry and the Federation of Industries a special system for small and medium-scale industries whose total cost ranges from LE500,000 to LE1mn each, including land and premises. The said system gives priority to labour-intensive industries and projects established in Upper Egypt.



## Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt Financial Statement MAY 1995/MAY 1996

RESULTS in L.E.	As of May 18, 1996	As of May 29, 1995	Growth rate
Total balance	6424	6226.5	3.2%
Deposits	5074.7	4933.3	2.9%
Investment balance	5825.1	5665.4	2.8%
Bank revenues	570.4	508	12.3%
Total revenues	367.7	349.8	5.1%
Net profits	287.2	245.9	16.8%
Shareholders profits	275.5	245.9	12%

The bank established and holds shares in 38 companies operating in various fields. The total capital of these companies amount to L.E. 1121 mn. of which the bank owns L.E. 196 mn.

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## Al-Ahram Weekly

### A test of honesty

It is no surprise that the peace process tops the list of items on President Mubarak's agenda during his trip to Washington. While meeting with Clinton, Mubarak will impress upon the US president the need to continue with the peace process along the guidelines already agreed upon in previous accords. In short, he will simply state those principles which Clinton should be committed to if he is indeed "an honest broker of peace", as the US would have the world believe.

Talk, especially when it comes to matters of such importance, is cheap. Clinton and Netanyahu can pledge their commitment to regional stability, but only their actions will prove whether they are truly interested in peace-making or deal-breaking. For Clinton, such actions must begin by not allowing domestic electoral concerns to supersede the realisation of a greater goal. And while Netanyahu may keep repeating that he seeks peace in exchange for security, the reality is that security is a product of peace, and a product of compromise. Mubarak will stress this fact to Clinton and, for the sake of the region, he should listen carefully.

Netanyahu may have succeeded in stalling during his meeting with Clinton three weeks ago, but he has fooled no one. Stalling is a surefire way of guaranteeing that, for example, the economic strangulation placed on the Palestinians will blow up in the face of Israel and the peace process as a whole. Consequently, Netanyahu's hollow promises any more than the Arabs can. Instead of concluding a military aid package with Israel, it would be more prudent to impress upon the Israeli leader that once peace is realised, the need for arms stockpiling on a regional scale will be greatly minimised.

In such a light, Mubarak's trip to Washington, coming after his meeting with the Israeli prime minister in Cairo last week, aims to put the peace process back on track by allowing all parties involved to have an unfettered understanding of the role they must play. Clinton must see his part through and Netanyahu must learn a few lines not laden with rhetoric and then act. Anything less amounts to nothing.

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# No one way street

Differences between the US and Egypt should not obscure the depths of their mutual interests, argues **Ibrahim Nafie**



The foresight to realise the limits of armed action, given the nature of the American-Israeli relationship and the radical shift in the world order in favour of the West and the US and away from the Soviet Union. It was, Sadat realised, in Egypt's interests to pursue peace. It was time to turn attention to rebuilding Egypt's infrastructure, which could not take place under the shadow of war. Nor was the Egyptian leadership willing to squander the opportunities to effect practical changes in the regional configuration, in favour of Egyptian and Arab interests, for the sake of an outdated ideology that viewed any settlement with Israel as a cardinal sin. In his thinking, Sadat was 20 years ahead of others in the region.

By the mid-70s, then, peace in the region had become a possibility. Egypt and American interests had converged, since both countries wished to see the region emerge from the vicious circle of conflict. The eventual result of that convergence of interests was the emergence of the land for peace formula in Madrid. It was never, though, an easy path. US domestic political considera-

tions, coming to a head every election, certainly represented an obstacle given the influence of the Jewish lobby. A change in the administration in Washington invariably led to a stall in the process, as newly elected officials needed time to familiarise themselves with the realities of the region. Israeli recalcitrance also represented a hurdle as Tel Aviv, consistently on the look out for get out clauses, embarked on perilous adventures such as the 1982 invasion of Lebanon.

But the desire to see a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict was not the only point of convergence between Cairo and Washington. Both, though for different reasons, shared an interest in promoting stability in the Gulf. The US, with the Arab oil boycott fresh in the minds of policy makers, was intent on securing Western supplies of petroleum. Nor was the Gulf of less economic significance to Egypt. Large numbers of Egyptian workers are employed in Gulf states, while Arabs from the Arabian Gulf constitute a large proportion of tourists visiting Egypt. The SUMED pipeline, the

transport of oil through the Suez Canal, and the expanding levels of Arab investment in Egypt, further strengthened economic links.

It was this shared interest in the stability of the Gulf that underpinned Egypt and America's support for Iraq during the Gulf War, and their alliance against the Iraqi regime following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.

These two sets of mutual interests — in promoting peace between Israel and the Arabs, and security in the Arabian Gulf — gave rise to other areas of mutual concern. The two countries were both concerned, at the height of the Cold War, to stem the destabilising Soviet influence in the region, particularly in Afghanistan and Ethiopia, while later, following the collapse of the Eastern bloc, they turned their attentions to combating terrorism.

Both countries too, exhibited concern over curtailing the spread of weapons of mass destruction and, were it not for American willingness to exempt Israel from international treaties regarding such weapons, there would be an even greater convergence

## Mubarak's Washington agenda

Mubarak's meeting with Clinton next Tuesday is the third in a triad of meetings between the leaders of the US, Israel and Egypt after Netanyahu's accession to power. **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** discusses the issues that will acquire prominence in the forthcoming talks

In an unexpected departure from his usual hard-line rhetoric, which he adopted even in Washington, Binyamin Netanyahu surprised Cairo with an uncharacteristic display of restraint and moderation during his visit, a volte-face that suggests an ability to manoeuvre rather than a change of heart.

Having said that, however, it is early days yet to pass final judgement on the new Israeli prime minister, whose image as the firebrand candidate of the Israeli right is a familiar one, but who remains an unknown quantity in his new role at the helm of the Israeli state. He is certainly not the unchallenged leader inside the Likud, lacking the credentials that would convince party stalwarts to accept his leadership without question. A case in point is Sharon, who only joined the cabinet following a major crisis among Likud bigwigs that was defused just hours before Netanyahu set off for Washington. As far as Sharon and the other founding fathers are concerned, Netanyahu represents a new generation of Israeli politicians they consider inexperienced and hence unqualified to run the country.

But thanks to the new election law, Netanyahu is the first Israeli prime minister to be elected directly by the people. As such, he does not owe his victory to his party, which at any rate holds fewer seats than Labour in the Knesset. Furthermore, the ruling coalition is a heterogeneous gathering comprising Israel's religious parties side by side with the overwhelmingly secular party of Russian immigrants. Significant in this respect is the absence of any minister, including foreign minister David Levy, from the official delegation which accompanied Netanyahu to Cairo.

What is certain, however, is that Netanyahu's approach to the peace process is at antipodes with that of Peres, even of Rabin. The notion of peace in the Middle East has a specificity of its own. Unlike other major conflicts, such as the German-French, the Chinese-Japanese, etc., the Arab-Israeli conflict is unique in that one of its main protagonists, namely Israel, has not enjoyed an uninterrupted presence in the region. According to historical records and archaeological findings, the biblical Kingdom of Is-

rael existed over 2,000 years ago but disappeared as its Jewish population was cast out on its long diaspora. As anti-Semitism and persecution of Jews reached dramatic proportions under Hitler, the Zionist call for the establishment of a national home in Palestine acquired wide appeal, leading to the creation of the modern state of Israel in 1948. This specificity casts doubts on the legitimacy of modern Israel, not only in the eyes of the Arabs, but even in terms of international law.

On the Israeli side, it has generated two contending schools of strategic thinking. One proceeds from the assumption that the Arabs will never willingly accept Israel's existence in their midst and must be forced to make peace through military disavowal. This is the Netanyahu line. The other proceeds from the assumption that the blatant use of military deterrence runs counter to the spirit of the age and that it must be consolidated by economic incentives (e.g. a Middle East market). This is the Peres line.

By placing security before peace, the new Israeli prime minister has effectively turned the notion of peace on its head. According to Netanyahu, peace must be tailored to fit Israel's security requirements, regardless of how well it serves those of the Arabs, while making the attainment of peace the top-priority issue entails devising security arrangements that respond to the requirements of both parties. Netanyahu talks of negotiations without preconditions, but occupation of territory is in itself a precondition eclipsing all others.

During his Cairo visit, Netanyahu sought to reassure his Arab interlocutors that he remains committed to the Madrid framework for peace. However, this framework is based on Security Council Resolution 242, which emphasises the inadmissibility of acquisition of territory by war, a provision since interpreted by all parties as meaning the exchange of land for peace. It is hard to see how Netanyahu can reconcile his refusal of this trade-off with the allegation that he has not abandoned the Madrid framework.

Actually, Netanyahu is trying to displace future

negotiations from the realm of principles to that of their interpretation and implementation. He is also banking on the coming US presidential elections and Clinton's dependency on the American Jewish vote. That is why ensuring Clinton's continued and unequivocal support for the peace agreements already concluded will be a priority consideration in Mubarak's forthcoming visit to Washington. To that end, the Egyptian president is expected to focus on a number of practical issues:

• The commitments of the Israeli state should take precedence over changing government policies. Israelis are entitled to elect the government they choose, but that government is not free to violate the provisions of Israel's agreements with external parties.

• There have been varying interpretations of UN Resolution 242, but even if it is interpreted as entailing the restoration of most, and not necessarily all, of the Arab territories, it can certainly not be read as meaning the restoration of none of the territories of a given Arab state.

• Washington should insist that the Palestinian Authority is the only legitimate representative of the Palestinians, especially now that it has been elected as such under international supervision.

• The future status of Jerusalem should remain on the agenda of the final stage of the negotiations, in accordance with the Oslo Agreement.

• Progress on the multilateral track cannot be dissociated from progress on the bilateral track. Convening the Cairo economic conference next November should be made conditional on the resumption of, and progress in, the bilateral negotiations.

Peres committed Israel to a peace process which responded to Washington's two-pronged strategic interest in the region: Israel's security and the stability of Arab oil. The recent act of anti-American terrorism in Saudi Arabia indicates that Netanyahu's version of "peace" promises to destabilise the region as a price for Israel's security. This is a strategic threat that no American administration can afford to ignore.

## Peace without tears

By **Naguib Mahfouz**

Binyamin Netanyahu's statements, in Israel and in the US, provided us with more than enough reasons to feel pessimistic, though such feelings were mitigated somewhat by the Israeli prime minister's subsequent meeting with President Mubarak, which appeared to hold out at least the promise of further negotiations.

In pursuing the path of peace, though, one must learn the lessons of the past, the first of which is that a lasting peace is a just peace, a fact made most clear by the disastrous consequences of the Treaty of Versailles.

A just peace must guarantee both Israeli security and Arab rights. It must make a clean break with the past, and act as a filter for the removal of historical differences. The peace we need must, in the end, be able to allow people to forget the resentments of the past, and all its negative connotations, and allow them to embark, unfettered by such differences, on a new future.

Only then will we be able to combat extremism, a phenomenon which has become increasingly prevalent in the world over. Extremism, after all, is rooted in precisely those feelings of oppression that would be dispelled once a just peace is achieved.

Based on an interview by **Mohamed Salmany**.



### The Press This Week

**Al-Gomhuria:** "Has Netanyahu's short visit to Cairo shown that he has changed and is now a reformed man who has renounced his old ideas and stances? To think that he would have changed in just a few hours is dangerous and unacceptable. It is equally wrong to claim that his oratorical or negotiating skills have enabled him to fool the Egyptians, while he remains as extremist and intransigent as ever." (Mahfouz El-Ansari, 21 July)

**Rose El-Youssef:** "Regardless of how wide the differences are between Mubarak and Netanyahu, the visit of the Israeli premier was not meant to narrow them. It was only a test of the waters and a measure of the extent of mutual understanding — particularly as this visit was reluctantly welcomed by both the state and the people. This was one of the few times that everybody — the people, the government and the opposition — all agreed on an issue." (Adel Hamouda, 22 July)

**Akhbar El-Yom:** "The Netanyahu who visited Washington is not the same premier who came to Cairo... The first rejected all previous agreements with the Arabs. The latter pledged that he would respect all of them... So which is the true face of Netanyahu? Our response is one of suspicion and caution that there might be a third Netanyahu in Tel Aviv... We no longer believe in words or promises, we only believe in facts." (Mustafa Amin, 20 July)

**Al-Ahram:** "The statement made by the Israeli premier in Cairo about the peace process in the Middle East was different to a great extent from all his previous statements starting from the election campaign in Israel to his address before the US Congress. Although his stances have not radically changed, they have at least become negotiable, a thing which provides a start from which the peace process can continue." (Editorial, 21 July)

**Al-Arabik:** "Is it not one of the ironies of fate that the entire Arab nation is dependent on a word from the Israeli premier and that 21 Arab capitals should strain their ears to listen to the utterances from the venerable Binyamin Netanyahu and become optimistic or pes-

### The many faces of Bibi

simistic accordingly, smiling brightly because peace is at hand or frowning sadly because Binyamin does not approve?" (Mahmoud El-Maraghi, 22 July)

**Al-Wafd:** "Netanyahu's visit brought nothing new. This is the only fact that observers have come up with about that unwelcome visit — the most unwelcome ever." (Editorial, 19 July)

**Al-Gomhuria:** "Netanyahu has the opportunity to determine what is meant by 'land for peace'. No matter how he twists and turns there is no escape from the definitions of the international community. Anything else would be a waste of time in view of local, regional and international developments and would limit his options as there is no solution but peace." (Samir Ragab, 20 July)

**Al-Akhbar:** "Mr Netanyahu, if you are visiting Cairo so that we get to know your point of view, we already know it. And if you are visiting Cairo to know our point of view, you already know it. So, you can see that this visit of yours has ended even before starting. Goodbye!" (Ahmed Ragab, 17 July)

**Al-Wafd:** "There is no doubt that the tone has changed, yet the substance remains the same. Israel's ruler has used his debating skill to sell us words that suit the circumstances, but his stances remain the same. With his right hand he has given us everything... with his left he took it all away. Everything needs to have his own explanation and every article of peace is dependent on his own understanding." (Gamal Badawi, 20 July)

**Al-Ahali:** "It is very likely that Netanyahu's new rational appearance... is only an attempt to gain more time and ease the general hostility against him, to give him a wider chance to sort out things at home and secure a firmer grip on power. In Cairo, he avoided any reference to anything conflicting with his previous statements, leaving all 'specifications' for future negotiations." (Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, 24 July)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



Gamal Abdel-Nasser raises his arm to salute the crowds. His nose, like the beak of a bird, hides both his moustache and, beneath it, his smile. The line of the chin, counterpointing Nasser's nose, acts as a mental aspect, both historical and physical. The arms raised around him create a halo of flowers, applauding the president who four decades ago nationalised the Suez Canal.

هكذا من الأصل



## Close up

Salama A. Salama

### Softening up Netanyahu

Will the Arabs be required to tow the line of the new Israeli government, which insists on prioritising security over peace, or will the Likud government and its far-right coalition partners have to adjust their own position according to the dictates of peace agreements to which Israel is already committed? This is the question that lies at the heart of any discussion of the future of the region.

Clearly the US made a decision early that Netanyahu's new government needed time to familiarise itself with the situation and make the adjustments necessary to reconcile its domestic position with its international commitments. Certainly there was a hope that Netanyahu would show sufficient flexibility during his Washington visit to enable the peace process to carry on. The visit, though, served merely to harden Netanyahu's position and President Clinton's administration showed no signs of wishing to confront the new Israeli prime minister.

By now it should be obvious to all that President Clinton, even if re-elected, lacks the stomach for any public controversy with Israel, much preferring that any differences be dealt with behind the scenes. America has left it to the Arabs, and to Egypt in particular, to soften up Netanyahu and convince him of the importance of revivifying the peace process by agreeing to implement articles already agreed upon. The US position appears to be based both on the assumption that the Arab camp has made peace with Israel can win Netanyahu over to the peace process, and on the perfectly reasonable belief that the Arabs can no more make peace with only half of Israel than Israel could with half the Arabs.

And the Arabs, on their part, appear on the whole to have accepted the US position without much ado, if only because they realise that, with presidential elections so close, there is little that they can expect from the US at any time. They have no option, then but to attempt to reduce Israel with the political and economic benefits that will accrue through integration with the Middle East.

This may seem to represent a retreat in the Arab position. It is, however, a retreat in the sense that it involves any leadership on positions jointly held by the Arab world and the Arab summit in Cairo or if Syria, Jordan and the Palestinians, delay in patching up their various differences. And should Israel manage to play Arab parties one against the other in an attempt to engineer a last-minute deal with selected Arab states, then any Arab efforts to achieve a lasting peace will be tantamount to whistling in the wind.

What seems most needed at the moment is a concerted effort by the Arabs to convince America that its interests in the Arab world cannot be protected simply by security pacts and military alliances, nor by calls to fight terrorism. Its interests can only be guaranteed by establishing a just peace, which implies most active American participation in solving these issues that continue to stand in the way of the peace process. President Mubarak's visit to Washington next week could not have come at a more significant moment.

Compassion



## Do the Arabs have a future?

The symptoms: severe depression. The cause: centuries of humiliation. The goal: complete revival. And the cure? Galal Amin diagnoses the ills of the Arab world and suggest ways to find a cure

The Arabs are a humiliated nation. Even before the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, they had been subjected to foreign occupation, political fragmentation, economic exploitation and cultural oppression. The process of humiliation accelerated after the establishment of Israel, but the pace grew even more rapid after the Israeli invasion of 1967, the Israeli occupation of Lebanon in the 1980s, the signing by Egypt, the Palestinians and Jordan of humiliating peace treaties with Israel, and then the acceleration of economic agreements to the establishment of what is called a "Middle Eastern market" — for the benefit of Israel and at the expense of the Arabs. The most recent Israeli invasion of Lebanon last April, and the indiscriminate killing at Qana, condoned by the US government, of innocent civilians taking refuge at a UN camp, was only the most recent declaration of Arab powerlessness in the face of aggression by Israel and Western powers.

No nation has been so utterly humiliated while showing so little sign of resistance. Arab intellectuals, in the face of this humiliation, have taken two separate paths. There are those who decided to put on a brave face and pretend that "what has been happening is not only inevitable but could also turn out to be to the Arab advantage. Members of this group prefer to treat what has been happening to the Arabs as part of a much wider international trend towards the greater supremacy of economic forces, the decline of ideology and the greater integration of all nations into the deepest-ever economic and cultural "melting pot". Israel is not a threat but a "challenge", the goals of "national" independence and political sovereignty are outdated and irrelevant since, in the new world that is being formed, no one is independent and no nation is, in any real sense, sovereign. There is no goal the Arabs could pursue more worthy than "rapid economic development" and improving their "competitive position"; there is nothing to which to aspire beyond a repetition of the South Korean miracle and the miracles of other tigers in southeast Asia.

The other camp is the group of "dreamers" who, sad and disappointed as they may be, have not yet lost hope, although they are at a loss to identify any solid ground for any hope at all. They keep referring to a period in the 1950s and '60s when the dream of Arab unity came very close to fulfilment, when the Arabs seemed able to dictate their will, to launch rapid economic development and industrialisation, build up a strong army and achieve a reasonable degree of social justice and when the people seemed to trust their political leadership. If this could happen in the not-so-distant past, why could it not happen again? But every day that passes sees this dream slipping further and further away from the domain of the possible, and with every new humiliation, this latter group of "dreamers" loses one after another of its members, not necessarily to the other group of "realists", but to sheer despair.

I must admit that I find it difficult to identify with either of these two positions. I find something basically "immoral" in the attitude of almost all those who advocate the former position, who seem to me to be trying to rationalise a position which is disloyal and defeatist merely because it provides them with personal safety and comfort. This position is naturally welcomed and supported by almost all Arab governments and powers external to the Arab world, including several institutions which extend financial aid to "research" in a great variety of fields linked to social sciences and the

humanities. It is a pity, it seems to this group, to sacrifice all this support in the name of a dream that does not have the slightest chance of fulfilment. Articles, papers and books are endlessly published, and conferences and symposia organised, with the sole message that the Arabs have no future except through full integration, economically and culturally, with Israel, as a "Middle East Market", with the West, as a potentially "civilised" nation; and with consumer society, as good citizens of the "global village". Arab intellectuals in this group vary, of course, in the degree of shamelessness with which they advocate these ideas, and some (though these are extremely rare specimens) honestly believe in them; but they are all helping to bring the Arabs to their dismal end.

What I find unacceptable is not this group's insistence that "the world is changing", that economic forces are rapidly replacing ideological and even national affiliations. This is very true, but there is no reason for the intellectual simply to bow to whatever seems to be the current trend. What remains of an intellectual if he/she bows to current trends, however powerful or inevitable these trends may seem to be? And if the intellectual happens to be Arab, what could he/she be to his/her people if the only thing he/she seems capable of doing is to sing the praises of whatever happens to be the fashion of the day? Economic development may be a worthwhile cause, but this is not the answer to the question of whether the Arabs have a future. If the question meant "can the Arabs achieve rapid economic progress?", the answer would be: "of course they can". In this sense the Arabs do have a future, in the same way as any Third World country has a future, or the Russians have a future, even after the collapse of their empire. There is really nothing very difficult about raising rates of growth or balancing a government's budget or a country's external accounts. I am asking the question: "Do the Arabs have a future?", however, in a very different sense: can the Arabs develop their economies without reproducing the same ugly, crowded and polluted cities, the same consumer culture, the same... etc? Can the Arab develop their economies while at the same time preserving respect for their traditions, inventing a new kind of schools for their children without destroying their language and architecture? The former school of intellectuals contemptuously dismisses these questions as a waste of precious time, either on the grounds that there is really little in our culture that is worth preserving, or on the grounds that some loss of cultural identity is the inevitable price of economic progress. I reject both arguments, on the grounds that economic development is desirable only insofar as it allows a nation to express itself more fully or, as one wise anthropologist defined development, as "the increasing attainment of a society's own cultural values". To give these values away for the sake of economic progress is to throw out the baby with the bath water.

But to say this is not to go all the way with the other group of Arab intellectuals, many of whom appear to be clinging to certain ideas which are no longer tenable. One idea which should be quickly dispensed with is that any worthwhile reform may be achieved within the present political framework. The truth is that no amount of "Arab summit", agreements or conferences which declare their aim to be finding a way out of the present Arab predicament could really be a step towards a solution. They are themselves symptoms of this predicament.

Secondly, it is important to realise that the present state of the Arabs is not the result of a relatively recent decline dating from the defeat of the Nasserist project of Arab unification and national rehabilitation. The short period of "Arab Awakening" of 1955-1967 should rather be seen as a brief interruption in a much larger process of decline. Mohamed Ali's ambitious project of economic and political revival in the early decades of the past century could itself be so regarded: another short-lived interruption of a long declining trend. And both Mohamed Ali and Nasser failed for the same reason: the Arabs had become too weak to stand up to the aggressive expansion of the West.

Thirdly, and at the cost of being more sinister, even brief Arab successes must be seen in the light of a changing international environment. Neither Mohamed Ali nor Nasser would have succeeded, even partially, had the international environment not been favourable at the time. Of course, each of these two great men had exceptional personal characteristics which helped to bring about those successes, but what made them even more "exceptional" was that they happened to rule at a time when no single superpower could alone dominate the world. When world domination by a single power became possible, the two men were suddenly cut down to size. It is important to admit this if one is to shed the illusion that these two glorious periods in Arab history (1820-40 and 1955-67) could be repeated simply by introducing some domestic reform or by a happy coincidence such as the birth of another inspired Arab leader. Alas, even these happy events, unlikely as they are, are not sufficient to bring about an Arab revival. The process of decline had already started with the first encounter with the modern West, almost exactly 200 years ago, and since then the spells during which this decline was arrested were inevitably short-lived and dependent mainly on external circumstances which allowed the Arabs no more than temporary relief. No real and secure revival could therefore be hoped for unless the original causes of the decline are squarely met.

When I say that Arab decline started two hundred years ago, I do not mean to deny that, even before the first encounter with the modern West, the Arabs had been showing symptoms of weakness. Political disintegration, economic and intellectual stagnation were the rule rather than the exception for at least the preceding three centuries, but in the absence of Western encroachment the opportunities for political, cultural and economic revival were always at hand. This is shown by the numerous movements for cultural and economic reform in various parts of the Arab and Muslim world during the late 18th and throughout the 19th century, movements which were dealt crushing blows by the invading West. The Wahhabis in Arabia, the Senousis in Libya and the Mahdists in the Sudan are examples of strong movements for cultural and religious reform, in addition to the movements for political and economic reform of Mohamed Ali in Egypt, Emir Bashir in Lebanon and Daoud Pasha in Iraq. Before the Arabs came under Western domination, the Arabs were indeed stagnant for centuries, but there had always been a latent potential for emerging from this stagnation by purely domestic efforts. Since the beginning of Western dominance, every domestic effort at national revival has been severely crushed, to which was added, during the last 80 years, the disastrous encroachment of Zionism.

## Soapbox

### Netanyahu left stranded

When David Levi, Israel's minister of foreign affairs and deputy prime minister, threatened to resign his appointment if Israel's newly elected prime minister did not include Ariel Sharon in his cabinet he inadvertently exposed the fragile base of Benjamin Netanyahu's government. The Labour Party, after all, won the largest block of seats in the Knesset, the reason why Netanyahu was forced to stitch together a coalition including five other parties.

The result is that every time Netanyahu backs down from commitments made during the elections and upon forming his cabinet he faces the prospect of one or more ministers withdrawing, threatening his Knesset majority. In which case his options are few — to form a new cabinet, to dissolve parliament, or to invite the Labour Party to participate in a national unity government.

Netanyahu came to power with the support of a broad array of individuals, parties and groups with divergent interests. They are bound by neither a single platform nor a shared concept of unity. Indeed, all they have in common is extremism and if Netanyahu does not placate that, they will withhold support. Given the fragility of this situation, the most likely eventual scenario is the formation of a predominantly secular national unity government, with the religious parties in opposition. The political arena in Israel will be split into a secularist axis, based in Tel Aviv but including kibbutz members and most of the army, and a religious axis, based in Jerusalem and drawing its support from religious fundamentalists and their extremist leaders.

While there is no essential difference between Labour and Likud when it comes to the secular ideology of Zionism, the traditional secularist parties have found themselves retreating before resurgent religious parties. Which leaves Netanyahu dependent upon a religious constituency to which he, though an extremist, does not belong.



This week's Soapbox speaker is a columnist specialised in Palestinian affairs with the opposition Al-Shaab.

Mahgoub Omar

## To The Editor

### Napoleonic dimensions

Mr. A progressively increasing number of letters to the editor have been lately expressing objection to the idea of bicentennial celebrations of the French expedition to Egypt. The objection is based on the military, or as some like to call it "imperialistic", dimension of the expedition. Proponents of this view cite the violations and even the crimes committed by Napoleon's soldiers against Egyptians, but seem to forget or overlook the fact that sheer military might was what won the battle in the 18th century — the criterion of power.

Despite this, however, it was the presence of the French troops on Egyptian soil which spawned the national spirit to recover from over 20 centuries of slumber and occupation. So much so that the French expedition came to mark the end of the Middle Ages in Egypt and the dawn of its modern history.

Why, therefore do we ignore the non-military or rather scientific aspect of the French expedition? Specifically the scholars, the scientists, the artists, the doctors, etc. It was the French expedition which introduced the practice of democracy in Egypt, as exemplified by the Shura council, surveyed and registered Egypt's monuments and revalued their value in the eyes of the world.

and deciphered the hieroglyphs, delved into their symbols and revealed their meanings.

The French introduced a printing press which Mohamed Ali later purchased to found the Amiriya Printing Press. In fact, we could go on to great lengths in enumerating the scientific societies established by Napoleon which are still contributing substantially to enrich Egyptian life.

Egypt itself became an imperialistic state under Mohamed Ali and Khedive Ismail. Its conquests extended to Lake Victoria and the sources of the Nile in the south, to the Arab Peninsula in the east and to Turkey and Greece in the north. We would not do ourselves much if we assessed the role of the French expedition in terms of an invading and occupying force rather than in terms of the consequences and results of the expedition in the various walks of life. To apply the same yardstick to other situations we would have to consider the Islamic conquest of Egypt in the order of an Arab invasion and occupation.

The events of history must be examined objectively, parochial sensitivities should not colour realities. The commemoration of historical events is an opportunity to study the events and the consequences they led to. The commemoration takes more than a cake and 240 candles.

Last year I commemorated the first centenary of the death of Khedive Ismail alone, by publishing a comprehensive work on the Khedive Post (*Al-Basta Al-Khedive*). As a result, I was accused of being a royalist! I am, however, presently writing a comprehensive work about Nasser and will most probably celebrate alone the bicentennial of the French expedition with a book on Napoleon due to appear in 1998. I hope then that I will not be accused of being an agent of France!

Dr. Magid Mohamed Farag  
President, Max Group  
Cairo

### The high road

Sir: Classy journalism is usually evidenced by the caliber of subject matter, information, and analysis which are all delivered to the reader via, hopefully, a distinct and refined linguistic style. Real professional journalists strive to inform and stimulate their readers with regard to issues and concerns.

I was quite disheartened recently by the campaign in the national and opposition newspapers to bash Benjamin Netanyahu, the prime minister of Israel, before and during his first visit to Egypt.

In my opinion, the bashing went beyond

the limits of good taste and fair criticism. The barrage included insults and derogatory use of adjectives derived from the prime minister's name in Arabic.

To be sure, there are valid reasons to be irate with the prime minister, but our displeasure with the man should be confined to the realm of objective and rational criticism of policies and positions.

Insults and snide cartoons cannot bear much consequence on Netanyahu's position. The end result is that our image will suffer and our emotional immaturity will be confirmed. In this regard, I applaud the *Weekly* for taking the high road as a standard policy.

Dr. Fayed Shihab  
Alexandria

### Crimes against man

Sir: The international community has been pressing Radovan Karadzic to hand himself in to the UN War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague to be tried for crimes against humanity. He is accused of a number of crimes during the war in Bosnia including destroying religious sites; raping and torturing thousands of people; mutilating, slaughtering, and executing hundreds of women and men and burying them alive in mass graves; killing

hundreds of innocent children and using hostages as human shields to avert NATO air strikes.

After all these savage and brutal crimes against humanity, I ask the international community what kind of penalty would be appropriate?

Shady Asmail Bahr  
Aswan

### Palace disappeared

Sir: Whatever happened to the Manial Palace Hotel? I learnt through the pages of *Al-Ahram Weekly* that it was to close temporarily because the Egyptian authorities had refused to renew the contract of Club Med, the French company which had previously run the hotel. The Manial Palace returned to EGOH, the Egyptian holding company, who, we were informed, had great plans to upgrade facilities. That was two summers ago, and I've heard nothing more since.

The Manial Palace Hotel is certainly a potential money-spinner. It is, I believe, Cairo's only hotel with extensive grounds, which are (were?) beautifully cared for, featuring carefully labelled sub-tropical plants, ancient trees, peaceful lawns and a swimming pool. It also includes, of course, the Manial Palace itself, once the home of Prince Mohamed Ali.

Outside private clubs, the Manial Palace was one of the few places in Cairo where you could feel far from the city.

Is the hotel to reopen? Who is to run it? Are its gardens to be preserved?

Janet Fielding  
Masadi

### Tobruk holiday

Sir: I am writing to convey my appreciation of the Libyan Mediterranean resort of Tobruk, where my wife and I stayed recently.

We were charged a modest \$45 a night for our large room in a comfortable hotel not three blocks from the sea. The room was of equal or higher standard than many so-called de luxe suites that are billed at several times that rate in Cairo's exclusive five-star hotels.

The standard of service afforded by every member of the staff was of such a high calibre that any one of them could have been the actual owner. I would also recommend the excellent seafood on offer in the hotel's spacious and welcoming restaurant.

More people should visit Libya and its wonderfully inviting northern coastline. The struggle for a tourist visa is worth the hassle.

Gianluigi Toscanini  
Garden City



# A certain perfume

Foolish things remind David Blake of nothing more than me versus you versus me



A summer remembrance of sounds past: Mohamed Abdel-Wahab, the colossus whose songs continue to attract a mass audience

Arabic takhti, Open Air Theatre, Cairo Opera House, 18 July

Where do song birds go in the winter? If they are good, they go to the opera houses of Europe-America. In summer time, if they are famous, dead and Egyptian they leave their perches in paradise and fly home to Cairo. Egypt is a land of conventions, the latest being a return flight to the Cairo Opera House's open air Arabic takhti. The venue is large enough, picturesque and cool even on the most humid mid-summer night. So the great gaudy ghosts come in on the summer air to do their annual job of haunting, regular as Banquo.

Only the highest are chosen — Abdel-Halim Hafiz, Mohamed Abdel-Wahab, Umm Kalthoum, and among the living, Warda. First among the ghosts, of course, is Umm Kalthoum. But dead or alive, they have forged a tradition of their own, beyond the vagaries of fashion. They are icons whose sheen never dims.

Interesting to wonder when and how this tradition of singing came about. Did Umm Kalthoum's forerunners, before the age of the disc or the tape, sing as she sang? Did the tradition which produced them begin long ago? What did singers sing in the grand Cairo of the 18th century?

There were always voices, of course, even in very ancient Egypt. Umm Kalthoum's technique and vocal personality sprang from old roots, religious and secular. But the form that enabled her to flower in a dynamically changed 20th century had very firm traditions.

These popular singers represent, in many ways, an ancient sound revived to cope with the new, the odd and the dramatic outpourings of our times. One thing they all have in common is the strange feature of placing all accent on the word. *Prima la parole* — something it took Europe centuries to learn.

The singers represented in performances by today's young artists were, and are — in Warda's case — first masters of the word and then of the art of wrapping it around the note. Every syllable of the august originals are

heard, even by strangers to the Arabic language.

What of the songs themselves, and the sacred monsters who sang them? After a short lead in by the very good orchestra, every one of whom seemed to be a virtuoso, Hamdi Hashem sang two songs by Abdel-Wahab and one by Mohamed Fawzi. The set began with one of those exciting, long held *ostinato* notes used to introduce a solo performer. It is as dramatic an entrance as having to slowly descend a steep staircase as used to be done in the old European music halls.

And so the star — for Hamdi Hashem seems one. He has a large, kindly voice, neither a fashionable boy whisper nor a heavy ho, muscular Rambo tone. He knows what he is doing and uses a lot of technique in this three-songs-in-one presentation, displaying trills, shakes and the kind of long Oriental runs found in Mozart, who of course had heard Oriental music. A fine opening.

Then came a lady in black. There is always one, one lady, one black dress. Why always black? Her set consisted of two Umm Kalthoum songs. Would the empress of the Orient have been furious if she had worn a striking monochrome in red? Anyway, this singer, Fatma El-Ganayri, looked handsome and sang with presence. She was careful to make even her words clear — the large audience expected this and knew by heart all the songs performed at this concert. The songs have, after all, become folk-lore from a time twice removed from this. The folk and the lore of that time are still alive which naturally begs a question — where are the folk of now? Maybe it is not so easy to represent the musical inferno of 1996.

Then another man came to sing other songs. Atef Abdel-Hamid had a soft grained but very expressive voice. He was the poet, the loner of yesterday's romance. He sang two of the finest songs of the night, one created for Abdel-Halim Hafiz, tears and joys of yesterday made palpable, powerful and haunting by the quizzical sweet and sour Abdel-Halim, the Hamlet of Egyptian song. A hard act to follow, though Abdel-Hamid had a good try.

Then came Sahar Nagui, in black and silver. She has a strong, vibrant voice that actually gets close, in climactic moments, to the haunting original Umm Kalthoum, with whom she opened her set of four songs. The next two were by Abdel-Wahab, while the fourth, a song performed most famously by Warda, closed the concert. The range demanded for the Kalthoum and Warda songs taxed this soprano. She was full out and sounded uncomfortable, but the heart of the song was there.

Interesting concert, fine interpreters and splendid instrumental soloists. Past and present, the voices are here and around but where is the spirit of the *zeitgeist* of the late 1990s. Not so easy to be a songbird from hell.

**Trio Jazz:** Ahmed Rabie, with Rashad Fahim, keyboard, Ahmed Ragheb, bass guitar, Open Air Theatre, Cairo Opera House, 21 July

Drums! Not a misadventure night's dream. Not drums, not again.

But as this concert began drums it was. Drums are not everyone's musical meat, not mine at least. But the large audience appeared used to be for battle, till the bomb took over. Now they don't all her words clear — the large audience expected this and knew by heart all the songs performed at this concert.

But when we heard the thunder of hooves that creates that frontier feeling, underpinned by the sound of the Ahmed Rabie jazz trio, it was an experience to be enjoyed. This trio has a strong, imperative sound, with no soft edges. There is no little drummer boy for Rabie, nor drum major in stretch nylon body sack with gold braid and top hat. We are for once fairly deep in the dark and doty nineties and it impresses. Though the summer juice is running very thin musically these two concerts, of the 18 and 21 July, kept the flagging, heat battered spirit up and going.

A drum is now more than a drum for Ahmed Rabie. Anything you hit to produce a noise is a drum for him. He doesn't bang drums but bangs discs.

Amid a tropical forest of silver creepers and lianas are three such discs — they are all part of his electronic equipment. He sits in the middle using force. At the back of the theatre space, amid the shadows of the terrace surrounding the opera, sit his companions who regulate, synthesise and blend the sounds we eventually get to hear. The sounds are often machine made, like a science fiction soundtrack. Sometimes, though, the Rabie trio rises above this. There are signs that something yet human remains, lurking about and arousing, if not pity for, at least an interest in, the species. In fact most of the music is pitiless. It is like trying to love a nuclear aircraft carrier.

The Rabie discs end at this point. A pause for running repairs. Then come the real drums, huge bronze pots, exotic and formidable. Most of the audience are Terminator-sized males. Why do men like drums so much? A jungle feeling? Protest, a sign of? We get amazing sounds from the pots, the discs, piano and bass guitar combining to do their virtuoso stuff.

A fizzy, fire cracker display emerges from the material, and it gets better as it progresses. You can take your mind off the song but the mechanics stay with you. Then authentic drum thunder. But this is Cairo not Las Vegas. The sound of the band may have extinguished the stars above but the Sheraton tower still stands. Then on again, things have changed, quieter, more rhythmic, less hassle. We move into a definable major key. It is beginning to dance. Dance little gentlemen — there are hardly any ladies present — but dance alone.

The sound changes again, and then becomes almost a commentary. The trip we have made has a catch. In the head on confrontation of now it is me, not you no togetherness is visible. Even the family unit is under threat. From what and how is the business of sociologists and politicians. Music merely makes its observations, a watcher in the centre of the silver jungle.

And then jazz proper. The bow tie is tied at last and there is that certain perfume around.

## Listings

### EXHIBITIONS

**Ibrahim Abdel-Ghaffar**  
Atelier du Caire, El-Rashid, Sidiyeh  
Hall, 2 Kasr El-Doula St. Downtown. Tel 574 6730. Daily ex: Fri. 10am-1pm. 6pm-10pm

**Alaa El-Sherif (Sculptures) & Ali El-Sakabi (Sculptures)**  
Atelier du Caire, El-Nagim Hall, 2 Kasr El-Doula St. Downtown. Tel 574 6730. Daily ex: Fri. 10am-1pm. 6pm-10pm

**Group Show**  
Masrabiya Gallery, 8 Cham-pollion St. Downtown. Tel 578 4404. Daily ex: Fri. 10am-8pm. Show featuring the works of artist exhibiting at the gallery in the last six years.

**George Setim (Paintings)**  
Gallery Salama, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St. Mohandessin. Tel 346 3342. Daily ex: Fri. 10am-3.30pm & 5.30pm-9.30pm. Until 31 July.

**Mohamed Shaker (Paintings) & Tarek Zahedi (Sculptures)**  
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nasim St. Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily ex: Sun. 10.30am-2pm & 3pm-8pm. Until 27 July.

**Group Show (Paintings & Sculptures)**  
Espase Gallery, 1 El-Sherif St. Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily ex: Fri & Sat. 9am-1pm. Until 3 August.

**Hellenic Library**  
Foundation for Hellenic Culture, 6 Asha, El-Toussour St. Garden City. Tel 333 1871. Daily ex: Sat & Sun. 10am-2pm. A display of books about Greece in Greek, English, French and Arabic.

**The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil**  
1 Kufour El-Ahmed St. Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily ex: Mon. 10am-6pm. Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil, including works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Monet and Rodin.

**Egyptian Museum**  
Tahrir St. Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily ex: Fri. 9am-5pm; Fri. 9am-11.30am & 1pm-3pm. Outstanding collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures and the controversial mummies' room.

**Coptic Museum**  
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily ex: Fri. 9am-4pm; Fri. 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm. Founded in 1910, the museum houses the largest collection of Coptic art and artefacts in the world.

**Islamic Museum**  
Port Said St. Ahmed Mohamed St. Dokki. Tel 390 9930/390 1320. Daily ex: Fri. 9am-4pm; Fri. 9am-11.30am & 1pm-3pm.

A vast collection of Islamic art and crafts including mashrabiya, lustreware, ceramics, textiles, woodwork and coins drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods and other countries in the Islamic world.

**Museum of Modern Egyptian Art**  
Opera House Grounds, Giza. Tel 340 6861. Daily ex: Mon. 10am-1pm & 3pm-9pm.

A permanent display of paintings and sculpture sharing the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to recent practitioners.

**Mohamed Nagui Museum**  
Chateau Pyramides, 9 Mahmoud El-Ghoni St. Giza.

A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mohamed Nagui (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge.

**Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum**  
Tahrir St. Giza. Daily ex: Sun and Mon. 9am-3pm.

A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge.

**Japanese Cultural Centre**  
106 Qasr El-Amr St. Garden City. Tomorrow 25 July. 6pm. Directed by Kuroki Kazuo the film is a series of vignettes featuring the daily lives of the citizens of Nagasaki before the Americans dropped the atomic bomb on 9 August 1945.

**Mit Fall**  
Rivoli, 12th July. Downtown. Tel 575 5033. Daily. 1pm. 3.30pm. 6.30pm. 9pm & 11pm. Starring Hossam Saleh Selim and Sherhan as a husband and wife who, upon being given the opportunity of choosing a new father, choose the same rich man and end up as siblings.

**Judge Dredd**  
Tahrir, 11/2 Tahrir St. Dokki. Tel 335 5726. Daily. 3pm. 6pm & 9pm. The story of four women, their friendship and their quest for love. With Whitney Houston and Angela Bassett.

**Toy Story**  
Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily. 10.30am. 1.30pm. 3.30pm. 6.30pm. 9.30pm & 11.30pm. El-Horreya I, El-Horreya II, Rossy, Heliopolis. Daily. 1pm. 3pm. 6pm. 9pm & 11pm.

The first fully computer generated motion picture from Disney.

**Afarit El-Asfah (Asphalt Demons)**  
Rivoli II, 26 July. Downtown. Tel 575 5033. Daily. 1pm. 3.30pm. 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Ossama Fawzi's debut film depicts the lives of a number of microbes drivers, performed by Mahmoud Hameida, Abdulla Mahmoud and Hassan Hosni.

**Ya Donia... Ya Gharami (Life... My Passion)**  
The 11, Nazr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily. 10.30am. 3.30pm. 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Magdi Ahmed Ali's debut film explores the intimate lives of three women played by Leila Eloui, Elham Shahine and Hala Sedqi.

**El-Tahwila (Railway Junction)**  
The 11, Nazr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily. 10.30am. 3.30pm. 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

This controversial is Amali Bah-nassi's first directorial outing.

**El-Salahif (The Turtles)**  
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St. Downtown. Tel 934 254. Daily. 10am. 1pm. 3pm. 6pm & 9pm.

With Samir Ghehram.

**Ightiyal (Assassination)**  
Sphinx, Sphinx St. Mohandessin. Tel 349 4017. Daily. 8pm. Diana Palace, 17 El-Ahly St. Emadeddin. Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily. 10am. 1pm. 3pm. 6pm & 9pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St. Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily. 10am. 1pm. 3pm. 6pm & 9pm. Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily. 10am. 3pm. 6pm & 9pm. Fatah Hammam, El-Roda. Tel 364 9767. Daily. 10am. 3pm. 6pm & 9pm.

**Fair Game**  
Karam II, 15 Emadeddin St. Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily. 10am. 1pm. 3pm. 6pm & 9pm. El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St. Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily. 3.30pm. 6.30pm. 9.30pm. Thurs midnight show. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St. Tel 250 0254. Thurs midnight show.

She is a woman with a secret who someone wants to silence and he is the cop who's going to help her... whether she likes it or not. With Cyndi Crawford and William Baldwin.

**Jumanji**  
Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St. Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily. 12.30pm. 3.30pm. 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St. Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily. 10.30am. 1.30pm. 3.30pm. 6.30pm. 9.30pm & midnight.

**El-Haram, El-Haram St. Giza. Tel 365 8358. Daily. 10am. 1pm. 3pm. 6pm & 9pm. A game with very real consequences. With Robin Williams.**

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Port Said St. Ahmed Mohamed St. Dokki. Tel 390 9930/390 1320. Daily ex: Fri. 9am-4pm; Fri. 9am-11.30am & 1pm-3pm.

A vast collection of Islamic art and crafts including mashrabiya, lustreware, ceramics, textiles, woodwork and coins drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods and other countries in the Islamic world.

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The first fully computer generated motion picture from Disney.

**The American President**  
Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily. 10.30am. 1.30pm. 3.30pm. 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

The president is a widower and about to fall in love. With Michael Douglas and Annette Bening.

**MUSIC**  
**Arabic Music**  
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, Giza. Tel 342 0598. 26 July, 9pm. Performance by Mohamed Fawzi, Abner Amin and Ahmed Ibrahim.

**Jazz Concert**  
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, Giza. Tel 342 0598. 28 July, 9pm. Featuring Yehya Khalil.

**Beat and Rhythym**  
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, Giza. Tel 342 0598. 31 July, 9pm. A meeting of Eastern and Western instruments featuring Yehya Khalil.

**THEATRE**  
**El-Sit Hoda**  
Sayed Darwish Theatre, Alexandria. Tel 482 5602/4825106.

The National Theatre production transfers to Alexandria for the summer. Starring Aida Abdel-Aziz and Ahmed Ibrahim.

**Brothers Rascals**  
El-Abd Theatre, Alexandria. Tel 596 0144.

**Ballo (Fantasy)**  
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Yousef Abu-Ma St. Madinet Nasr. Tel 403 0804. Daily. 10pm.

Starring Salah El-Sadoni and directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

**Zamballa Fil Mahatta (Hilalaboo at the Station)**  
Floating Theatre. Tel 364 9516. Daily ex: Tues. 10pm.

**El-Gazim (The Chair)**  
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Amr. Tel 355 2484. Daily. 9pm.

**Mesa' El-Kheir Taul...**  
Ya Masr (Good Evening Egypt, Agin) Mohamed Farid Theatre, Emadeddin. Tel 770 603. Daily ex: Tues. 9.30pm.

**El-Zaim (The Leader)**  
El-Zaim Theatre, Pyramids Road. Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily ex: Tues. 9.30pm.

Directed by Sherif Ansa, starring Adel Imam.

**Destour Ya Shadun (With Your Permission, Masters)**  
El-Fann Theatre, Ramses St. Tel 578 2444. Daily. 10pm. Sat. 8.30pm.

With Ahmed Badier and directed by Galal El-Sharkawi.

**Ka'b 'Aali (High Heels)**  
Radio Theatre, 24 Talaat Harb St. Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily ex: Tues. 8.30pm; Wed & Thurs. 10pm.

**Mama America**  
Qasr El-Amr Theatre, Qasr El-Amr. Tel 575 0761. Daily. 10pm. Mon. 9pm.

Directed by, and starring, Mohamed Sobhi.

**Bahlool Fil Istanbul (Bahlool in Istanbul)**  
Ramsis Hilton Theatre, Ramsis Hilton St. Tel 574 7435. Daily ex: Mon. 10pm.

With Samir Ghehram and Elham Shahine.

**Hazzem El-Ya...**  
El-Gazim Theatre, Abdel-Aziz Al-Soud, Madinet. Tel 364 4160. Daily. 10pm. Fri. Sat. 8.30pm.

Starring Fikr Abdou, directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

**El-Gamila Wel-Webshin (The Beautiful and the Ugly)**  
Zamalek Theatre, 13 Shaghor El-Dorr St. Zamalek. Tel 341 0660. Daily ex: Wed. 10pm.

Leila Eloui as the beauty and every one else as the ugly. Directed by Hussein Kamel.

**Old Times**  
El-Hanager, Cairo Opera House grounds. Tel 340 6861. Until 28 July. Harold Pinter's play, directed by Mohamed Abu-Soud, extended for a week. See review opposite.

**Pharaonic Panorama**  
El-Ghad Theatre — annex of the Ballroom Theatre, Agouza. Showtime 9pm. Directed by Sherif Sobhi.

**Yahya Ya Homama**  
Belram El-Tahr Theatre, Alexandria. Tel 597 9960.

With Bahs Gabane, Hassan Ish Ish and Hisham Khaleh.

**Charamiyat Atwa Abu Matwa**  
George Agha Theatre, El-Ezbekia. Tel 591 7783. Directed by Saad Ardash.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.

Please telephone or send information to Listings, Al-Ahram Weekly, Galaa St. Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by Inji El-Kashaf

## Theatre

### The riddle of the skirt

Nehad Selaiha watches as a young director wrestles with Harold Pinter's *Old Times* at Al-Hanager

I cannot pretend that I liked Pinter's *Old Times* much when I first saw it at the Aldwych back in 1971. Despite a very impressive cast — with Vivian Merchant and Dorothy Tutin as the two old friends who meet after 20 years, and Colin Blakely making up the triangle as the latter's husband — not to mention Peter Hall who directed, the play seemed to drag on endlessly and, as far as I could judge back then, quite pointlessly. I suppose I was too young to be moved by the nostalgic mood of the characters and not sufficiently sophisticated enough to appreciate Pinter's brand of wit or see the funny side of the sparring match between the husband and the wife's former girlfriend. The conflicting reminiscences and contradictory evocations of the past baffled me, and the sudden shifts from the present to the past were simply startling. I failed to realise then as I have since, that the ambiguity of the action was the essence of the play, that Pinter was using the very old and hackneyed dramatic formula of the *menage a trois* not only to cynically reveal the game of power and domination at the root of most relationships but also to question the certainty of memory and identity. I came out of the theatre feeling quite stupid and thoroughly exasperated and only cheered up when someone humouredly said that if only Decey, the husband could remember whose skirt (Kate's or

Anna's) he had looked up at a certain party 20 years before, all his troubles, and ours, would be over. Decey's pathetic attempt to break into the relationship between the two old friends and claim for himself a foothold in their past takes the shape of a story, somewhat crass and vulgar, but very funny, which is supposed to prove that he knew to her later, telling her that she had been punished for her naughtiness because some man spent the whole evening looking up her skirt. Was that man Decey? Was it her skirt he had looked up at Kate's underwear? Or was it Kate's skirt? At the climax of the battle over Kate, Decey repeats the same story about the party, this time in Kate's presence; then, suddenly, he is not sure: "She thought she was you" he says,

"Maybe she was you, maybe it was you..." At this point, however, neither the veracity of the story, nor the accuracy of Decey's memory count for much: the fact that what we call 'the past' is a bundle of biased, uncertain and conflicting narratives has been teasingly established; more importantly, the battle between Anna and Decey over Kate's affection is, as it soon transpires, quite pointless. In a sudden and quite unexpected burst of linguistic energy, Kate, who had been more or less completely silent throughout, except for a few random and desultory remarks, makes it clear that the fight between the two contestants (acrid despite the thin crust of civilized erotic banter) was really pointless: both had lost even before they started. For Kate, Anna and Decey had been dead a long time ago. That Pinter when writing the play had in mind a particular, quite well-known triangle — that of Leonard/Virginia Woolf and Vita-Sackville-West — is a very plausible proposition which I hope to investigate one day; the settings and characters are simply too close to this literary trio for the matter to be a mere coincidence. But even

back then the '60s; so instead of the '50s tunes, we had the Beatles, and rather than *Old Man Out*, the film that brings Decey and Kate (or was it Anna) together and figures prominently in Decey's recollections, we have Jean-Luc Godard's *Vivre Sa Vie*. The 'flea-pit' of a cinema Decey remembers is recreated by means of a screen on which shots of the film are projected. In the second half (the two acts of the play are played straight through with no interval), these are replaced with actors in telling shades. The three young actors did a very good job with a very difficult and tricky text — made all the more tricky by the director's insistence on playing up the lesbian potential of the relationship between the two old flames, Khalid El-Sawi. In particular, who, like Pinter, is both an actor and a playwright, gave a memorable virtuoso performance, and the audience who flock nightly to Al-Hanager adored every minute of it.

## Around the galleries



Ibrahim Abdel-Mughni

**BATIKS**, carpets and drawings by Soheir Osman are on show at the Opera House Gallery. These draw on Islamic and Pharaonic art for their inspiration. Salama Gallery exhibits paintings, bas-reliefs, mosaics and engravings on brass by George Selim. Maintaining the habit of hosting two artists concurrently, space at Extra Gallery is given over to sculptures by Tarek Zahedi and paintings by Mohamed Shaker. Zahedi's sculptures, in wood, bronze and marble, range from the abstract to the figurative while Shaker's paintings, which make use of various materials like rope, shells and pebbles, speak of Alexandria. Alaa Sherif's sculptures in wood, resinously figurative and abstract by turns, are on show at the Atelier du Caire, as are 15 paintings, variations on the pyramid, by Ibrahim Abdel-Mughni and a number of dynamic pieces by Ali El-Sakbi.

Reviewed by Nagwa El-Ashraf



# 'A sublime view'

**Nigel Ryan explores the trajectory of David Roberts, from Scottish slum to Royal Academy, taking in, of course, the Orient**



Above, Roberts in a costume drama of his own making, portrayed in 1840 by Robert Scott Lauder in Oriental dress and top left, Roberts as he appeared in the first edition of *The Holy Land*

The problem with David Roberts is that he is everywhere. He travelled widely, throughout the Middle East, crossing Syria, Palestine, and of course Egypt, producing endless sketches, some to be worked up into full blown paintings on his return to England, others to be forwarded to Louis Haghe, the Belgian plate maker whose name appears alongside that of Roberts on a large number of his Middle Eastern lithographs.

But though Roberts' fame rests largely on the product of his journeys in the region, he had in fact travelled widely before ever setting foot east of the Mediterranean. He produced views of France, Germany and the Netherlands, finished a series of engravings, *Pilgrims of the Nile*, commissioned by Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, and on the advice of David Wilkie, Roberts' friend and a leading portraitist of his day, travelled extensively in Spain, endlessly sketching. For two years he toured the peninsula, drawing ruins and monuments, paying equal attention to the Moorish architecture of Andalusia and the excesses of late Spanish Gothic. This journey was to result in the publication, in 1837, of *Picturesque Views of Spain* which, though by no means a cheap volume, still managed, in just two months, to sell some 1,200 copies. It should have provided Roberts with a considerable income had it not been for the artist's rather naive trust in his publisher.

Wilkie's advice to visit Spain had been informed by the knowledge that, to the armchair traveller at home, it remained an unexplored destination in the first half of the 19th century. It was sufficiently exotic — Catholic, for which read, as a 19th century Anglican would, blood and gore, martyrdoms and barbaric rites — to excite a prurient interest in the drawing rooms and libraries of England, an interest that translated into high sales figures and which, combined with a taste for the picturesque, could turn representations of far flung lands into a very lucrative business.

Roberts was born in Stockbridge, Edinburgh, in 1796. Stockbridge, now a well-heeled section of the Scottish capital, full of Victorian artisans' cottages converted by the professional middle-classes, was at the beginning of the 19th century on the outskirts of the city, a far from smart address. It was more or less a slum, an unlikely place for a Royal Academician to be born. Yet by 1838 Roberts had achieved sufficient success to be elected an associate of the Royal Academy and had negotiated the notoriously difficult route between the slums and Burlington House. It was a passage as arduous as any of his foreign excursions, and which took in, en route, a successful career as a set designer.

The journey began, though, with a seven year apprenticeship, with one Gavin Buege, a decorator of some local reputation. By 1815 he had moved to Perth, taking up his first paid work as a decorator before returning to Edinburgh, where he started designing sets for the Pantheon, a second-rate theatre which at one point asked its decorator to create the cityscape of Baghdad for a production of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*. By 1819 he was steadily moving up the ladder, just being appointed designer at the Theatre Royal Glasgow, and then at the Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh. By the beginning of the 1820s his reputation as a set designer had grown to the extent that he was commissioned first by the Drury Lane Theatre, and later by Covent Garden.

At the same time he was also developing a reputation as a painter, producing picturesque views for a seemingly insatiable market. He worked steadily and competently, lucratively mimicking a taste for Romanticism's soft tenderly and producing the kind of genre paintings that, if they would not be wholly approved by Ruskin, nonetheless approximated to the pantheistic principles mid-Victorian art critic high priest was to espouse in *Modern Painters*.

As a painter Roberts' breakthrough came with the exhibition of "A View of the Cathedral at Rouen" at the Royal Academy, as stagey a picture as one could hope. He became the subject of critical praise, an item in newspaper columns, and began to receive commissions. Indeed, on his European journeys he would spend much of his time on thumb nail sketches which, upon his return to England would be shown to potential patrons — among whose number Queen Victoria was eventually to be included — who would select the view they liked best, later to be worked up in to a full scale painting by the artist.

Such a process, allowing ample opportunity for the kind of atmospheric effects demanded by his audience was not, on the whole, likely to promote any great veracity, either architectural or topographic. Yet it was atmosphere, in the end, after which Roberts survived, because it was atmosphere that sold. And in this endeavour it is surely not too controversial a suggestion that his training and experience in the theatre was to prove immensely helpful.

It was, perhaps, the success of his Spanish venture and the resulting volume that encouraged Roberts to consider a similar project. But where to go? Germany, birthplace of European Romanticism, had been done to death. Everyone and anyone had done the Rhine, all precipitous cliffs, lonesome pines and towering castles, one with a brainwave. With general appeal. And then he hit on a brainwave. With the money he had made out of the Spanish book he decided to go to the Middle East, journeying to the land of the Bible, recording both biblical sites and the vast archaeological complexes, such as Petra, that were causing such excitement in Europe.

In August 1838 Roberts set off for Paris. By the 11th he was in Marseilles, where he booked passage on a steamer heading for Civitavecchia. He then travelled via Malta, crossing the southern Aegean, and

by the end of the month had arrived in Alexandria. From there he travelled as far south as Abu Simbel, making much of the journey on a *dahabiya*, which he had hired only with the greatest difficulty. By Christmas time Roberts was in Cairo, where he was to make more than a hundred sketches, before, in February of the following year (1839), setting off for Sinai. Upon reaching Gaza, he decided to head towards Jerusalem, and from there explored the valley of the Jordan. Heading north again, Roberts finally reached Baalbek, where he fell seriously ill. Intending initially to travel as far as Palmyra, the fever he had contracted forced him to curtail his plans, and so he journeyed to Beirut from where, on the 13 May, 1839, he was able to book passage on a ship headed for England.

The problem he faced, upon his return, was to sell his work. He approached a great many publishers, none of whom showed a great deal of interest until Francis Graham Moon finally offered the artist the sum of 3,000 pounds for exclusive rights to publish the works, as well as contracting Roberts to supervise the etching, a task that would be undertaken by the young Belgian engraver Louis Haghe.

The result was the phenomenally successful three volume edition, *The Holy Land, Syria, Idumea, Egypt, Nubia*, which appeared between 1842 and 1849. And Roberts' fate was sealed. His visions became, for 19th century England, the representation of the Holy Land. And thus a thousand book covers, calendars, gold framed reproductions and greetings cards were launched, together with a tradition that reached its culmination in the career of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, biblical illustrator par excellence.

The omnipresence of Roberts is a difficult phenomena to explain. He went everywhere and he is everywhere. He hangs in Cairo restaurants, on the sitting room walls of the city's residents. He is sold in every gift shop, in bazaars and five star hotels. In Egypt original lithographs, two color prints which were then completed by hand, a laborious and time consuming process, change hands for more than they do in London. Medium sized bookshops in provincial English towns all carry copies of one of the many modern editions of the work. But what lies behind this success?

Certainly contemporaries of Roberts, those who bought Moon's volumes as they appeared, thought that they were buying a window onto a region that they had

what they wanted. As a consequence he was to take quite remarkable liberties with both topography and landscape. And it is this, perhaps, that explains why so many of his landscapes might just as well be entitled "A view of the Rhine" were it not for the exotically clad figures in the foreground.

*Yesterday and Today: The Holy Land*, a massive and copiously illustrated volume, the first of two, published by AUC Press, provides a useful reference by juxtaposing Roberts' views with recent photographs of the same sites. In the introduction Fabio Bourbon concludes, somewhat disingenuously, thus:

"A bridge spanning the distance between past and present is offered by the splendid photographs taken by Antonio Attini, a young photo journalist who retraced the voyage of David Roberts, taking photographs that correspond with the lithographs. This unusual mingling of such radically different pictures is particularly informative about the inexorable results of the passage of

photo-journalist, who once again seeks to represent "one of the most appealing and perhaps mysterious regions of the world" by giving yet another eyewitness account, this time mediated through the lens of a camera. Yet what emerges through these juxtapositions of images, lithograph supplemented by photograph, is less an appreciation of the attrition of time — in a century and a half, even taking contemporary levels of environmental degradation into account, it is difficult to imagine so many mountains being reduced to heaps of rubble — than an acknowledgment of Roberts' desire for dramatic effect at the expense of topographic accuracy. We are back in the theatre, back to staging, to all those tricks of back-drop perspective.

On the 20 February 1839 David Roberts notes in his journal:

"Today we ascended to the summit of Sinai, which took us two hours... The view from the top is the most sublime that can be imagined."

But the panorama that Roberts creates is very much his own. Compare Attini's photograph of *The Ascent to the Summit of Sinai* with Roberts' print of the same. There is no question, having ascended the steps in Roberts' print, that the view could be anything other than sublime. Hardly surprising that this particular image, like a great many other of Roberts' prints, has made its way onto the cover of a book, in this instance *The Longest Journey*. Jennifer Potter's fictional account of the travels in Yemen of an intrepid Edwardian English gawlewoman who ends up, finally, incarcerated by wicked Turks.

While one should not be taken in by the discredited maxim that the camera never lies — the lens distorts the actual experience of any landscape as much as the brush — Attini's representation of the scene is a far closer approximation to reality than Roberts. The latter's perpendicular cliffs did not erode in a century, they simply were not there in the first place. Roberts created them for his audience, because this is how Mount Sinai should look and they bought the book because it did not fail their expectations. Without the four figures in the foreground, dressed straight out of the costume cupboard, it might as well be the approach to one of those Rhine land extravaganzas that travel brochures invariably refer to as "fairy-tale castles".

The volume *Yesterday and Today: The Holy Land*, covers Roberts' journeys through Sinai, Palestine and Syria. The planned second volume, which will cover his trip up the Nile Valley, and hence include much of the tourist bazaar stuff, as well as his work in Cairo, is planned for later in the year. The editors, while being a little slipshod with the text, have taken great pains to chronologically reorder the prints, changing the sequence of Moon's first edition. In doing so they have occasionally been forced to disregard the dating incorporated in the finished lithograph, which was in any case often provided by Haghe, in favour of the evidence supplied from Roberts' own journal. Such a pernickety approach to the ordering of the images is perhaps a little fastidious in a volume that purports, in its publicity material, to be "a lavishly illustrated gift book". But every publishing venture these days has to have its hanger, one more case of *plus ça change...*

Roberts died at the age of 68 in 1864, a distinguished artist, accorded a great many honours both at home and abroad. A pity he did not last longer, for three years later Verdi was commissioned to write his Egyptian opera, *Aida*. The reasons why Roberts would have been the ideal designer for the production lie less in his early experience in the theatre but in the lithographs of Pharaonic ruins that will comprise the bulk of AUC Press's second volume devoted to the ubiquitous David Roberts, R.A. Given the Khedive Ismail's reputation for extravagance, it could have been the business venture to top them all.

Illustrations taken from *Yesterday and Today: The Holy Land, Lithographs and Diaries* by David Roberts, R.A., text by Fabio Bourbon, photographs by Antonio Attini, AUC Press, 1996, LE 190

## Plain Talk

Critics are unpopular these days but this is hardly anything new. It would seem to be an occupational hazard, for in fact they have always suffered from such unpopularity which comes, in the main, from creative artists. Many creative artists have claimed in writing, like Nicholas Craig in his autobiography *I, an actor or in interviews*, that critics are invariably unsuccessful artists. Certainly one can say, without much fear of contradiction, that there is a general disenchantment between critic and artist. And nowhere has this feeling been made more palpable than in the usually sedate Summer Show at the Royal Academy in London which this year contains a painting by R. B. Kitaj called "The critic kills".

The exhibit is described by Michael Billington in the *Guardian* as "a disturbing, angry work that raises conscience-pricking questions for anyone in the appraisal business". The exhibition celebrates the artist's late wife, Sandra Fisher, who, the artist believes, died as a result of the savage attacks against her husband's exhibition that was organised in 1944.

According to Billington, the reviews were not merely bad, they were devastating and called into question his whole creative purpose and artistic talent. "Kitaj's wife had a stroke and died. At that time the artist said in an interview: 'They tried to kill me and they got her instead.'"

The reviews were indeed highly personal. One such review lamented the "foisting on us an heroic master, a saint painter puffed with *amour propre*, unworthy of a footnote in the history of figurative art."

Kitaj is not the only person who feels that criticism can kill. Robert Brustein, American director, academic and critic mentions in his *Making Scenes* that in the late 1970's he was running the Yale Repertory Theatre. He was directing *The Seagull* in which his wife Norma was playing the lead. The production was damned by the critic of the *New York Times*. Mrs Brustein continued until the performance run came to end but two days after the final show she died of a heart attack.

There was also the case of Mary Ure who in 1975 appeared in *The Exorcism*. As a result of bad reviews of her first night she also died. How many times have we been confronted in the cinema with that classic scenario — the show opens, the cast give their all, only to spend the rest of the evening in a state of nail biting suspense until the first editions of the newspapers arrive. Only then do they know whether they can sleep easily.

There is no doubt that the history of the arts is filled with hostilities between critics and artists. There is no doubt that no one, as Billington put it, "wants to be judged" or to be subjected to the slings of waspish critics. But compared to the past, current antagonism is less. Just think of the Ruskin-Whistler law suit in 1877 — which I dealt with in a past article — or the acerbic reviews given earlier this century by that mistress of the one-liner, Dorothy Parker, who once wrote of the performance of a leading actress that she managed to run "the entire gamut of emotions, from A to B".

Billington poses the question: "Must artist and critic always be forced to stare at each other across the barbed wire?" He comes up with an interesting theory, which is that commercial art regards the critic as an enemy. A bad review affects the purchase of seats or undermines the number of visitors. Thus critics can stop artists and those involved around them from making money.

There are, however, in the history of modern British and Egyptian art, incidents of healthy dialogue between artist and critic. I still remember the public debate engaged between Kenneth Tynan and Eugene Ionesco in 1958 about the theatre of the absurd. It was a debate that turned from personal criticism of Shawki to a wide ranging discussion of poetry in general.

Here in Egypt the problem now is not serious, since very little space is devoted to criticism and very few serious critics exist. But if I may venture an opinion I would say that criticism should not be regarded as the last word about a certain work of art, but as the opening of public debate. Critics should concentrate on the work itself without indulging in personal abuse.

As Robert Brustein puts it in *Who Needs Theatre?* a critic should be more than a policeman on the lookout for a misdemeanour. He should extend the artists' activities into a realm of meaningful discourse.

Mursi Saad El-Din



"Today we ascended to the summit of Sinai, which took us two hours... The view from the top is the most sublime that can be imagined"

David Roberts' Journal, 20, February, 1839

always known, if only from biblical references. By their very nature eye-witness accounts such as those provided by Roberts and, in a different medium by Roberts' contemporary, E. W. Lane (*Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* was written between 1833-1835, i.e. it was completed a year before Roberts embarked for Egypt) promoted themselves on the basis of their veracity. They were bought, in more or less good faith, because they purported to show what other places were really like.

Roberts, though, had a different agenda and his task, as an artist entrepreneur, was to give his readership

time. These photographs have no commentary: the reader can draw his or her own conclusions, or imagine a modern trip through what is certainly one of the most appealing and perhaps mysterious regions in the world. Before such eloquence, we shall leave the pictures to speak for themselves."

Publishing, like the leopard, finds it difficult to change its spots. The script, as written by the entrepreneurial Roberts remains persuasive, and his footsteps are to be followed by his modern equivalent, the



# Sehemi gets makeover

Beit El-Sehemi, one of Egypt's most charming medieval homes, is being transformed into a museum. Nevine El-Aref surveys the construction scheme



After succumbing to natural decay and suffering earthquake damage in October 1992, it was high time to restore Beit El-Sehemi, the medieval home named after its third owner Sheikh Mohamed Ahmed El-Sehemi, a famous merchant of the 18th century.

Restoration began two years back when the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) granted 1.900 million Kuwaiti dinars (over LE10 million) to the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA). This is the first time the AFESD earmarked funds for restoration and it is the beginning — it is hoped — for continued collaboration with the SCA.

As soon as the accord was signed, an in-depth study of the building's history, location, architectural style and interior decor was carried out, a video documentary was produced and 1:10 scale models were made for every room. Studies on the foundation substructure, the infrastructure of the surrounding area and an underground water table are now on the agenda, said Assad Nadim, director-general of the El-Sehemi restoration and documentation project.

As it stands, the house has a massive outer door

followed by a smaller doorway designed to preserve both the security and privacy of the household. Various halls, vividly offset by well-kept plants, lead off of the rectangular courtyard.

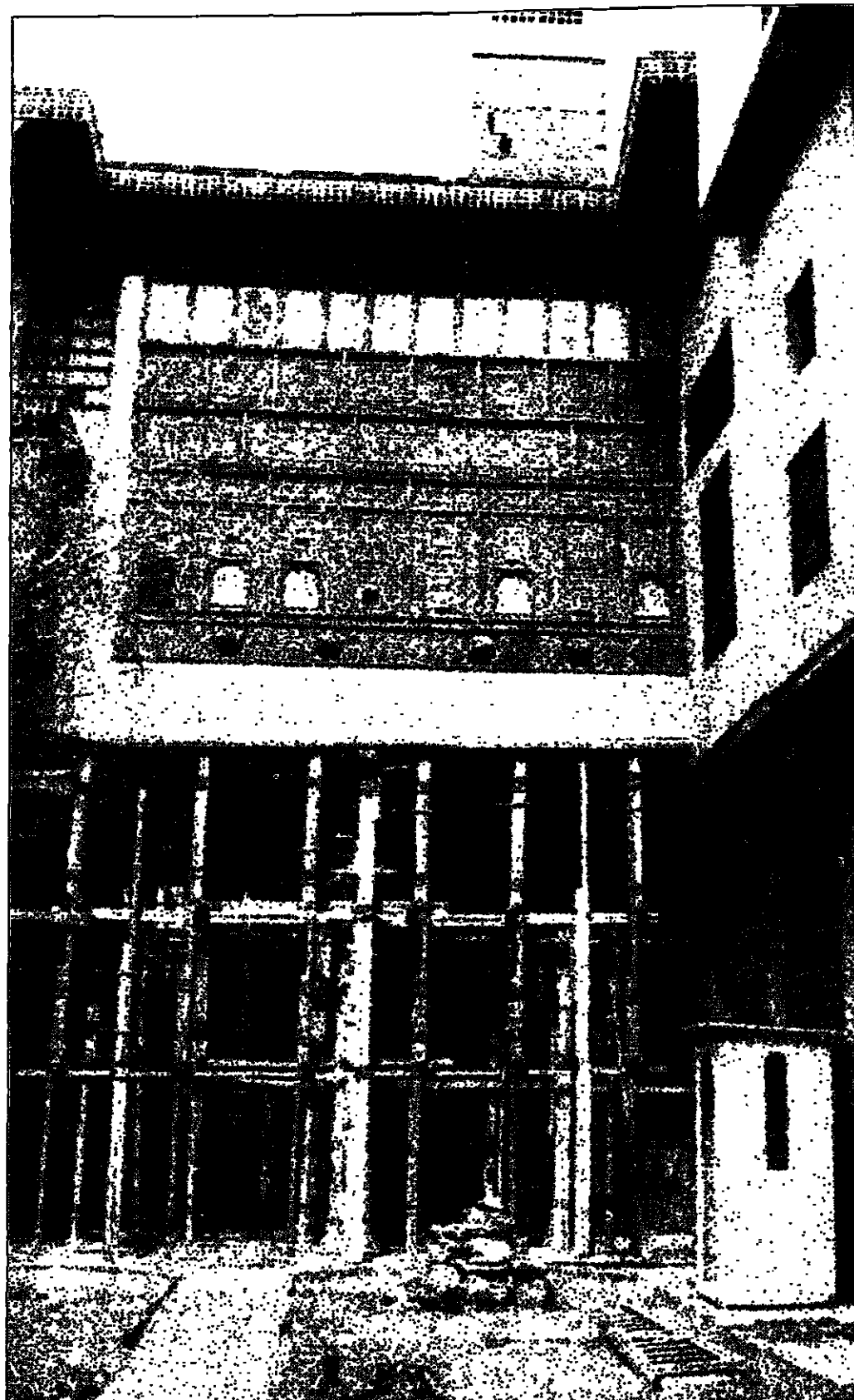
The *salamlik* (men's quarters) of the house has two main reception halls. The larger, known as *qa'at Al-Qur'an* (Qur'anic hall) was specifically earmarked for religious ceremonies and gatherings with distinguished visitors. The smaller and more intimate hall was reserved for gatherings with friends and relatives.

The *haramlik* (women's quarters) has a large number of rooms linked with corridors and a lavishly decorated stairway with oriental objects of great beauty. One of the most interesting rooms is devoted to Turkish pottery. Its walls are decorated with magnificent blue and white ceramic tiles. Other displays include diverse objects, furniture and fittings that were traditional in medieval Cairo.

Actual restoration started in March 1996 in the Qur'anic hall. One of the house's most unique features — the *shokhsheika* woodwork ceiling — has been removed so that its damaged and deteriorated parts can be replaced.

The house is scheduled to reopen in 1997. The ground floor will be set aside for lecture halls and a permanent computer centre where the house's history will be documented. Visitors will be able to tour the first floor, furnished with new Ottoman-style furniture. All other floors will be restricted to researchers and students.

Beit El-Sehemi is located in the Muski area on a small street called Darb Al-Asfur, about half-way between the mosques of Barquq and Al-Hakim.



Work in progress at Beit El-Sehemi

## Outward bound

An Egyptian road show is touring down under, reports Rehab Saad

An official road show is touring Sydney, Melbourne and New Zealand this week to inspire those down under to head for the land of the pharaohs. Organised by the Ministry of Tourism in cooperation with the Egyptian Tourist Authority and EgyptAir, the road show begins on the heels of the inauguration of EgyptAir's new service to Sydney earlier this year.

Dr Kent Weeks, the archaeologist who discovered the tomb of the sons of Ramses II, is one of the road show's main attractions. Weeks will lecture about his valuable discovery before the Australian parliament, the Australian Museum Society and at the state library in Melbourne.

Two Australian television programmes will also feature the archaeologist.

"To give Australians a taste of Egyptian folklore, we sent the musical troupe Hassan. Our objective is to mix tourism with culture and entertainment," said Elhamy El-Zayyat, head of Emeco Tours.

El-Zayyat added that there will be Egyptian-themed nights and receptions for Australians in tourism and media to meet their Egyptian counterparts.

A questionnaire aimed at gathering more information about Australian tourist needs and ideas about Egypt will be distributed during the trip.

Tourism officials say that

tourism from the region is still limited. In 1995, which was considered one of the most prosperous tourist seasons in Egypt, the number of Australian tourists did not exceed 31,128 and from January to June of this year, only 17,551 came to Egypt.

"It was impossible to promote any tourist movement between the two countries without having accessibility. The new flights will boost the market and encourage tourists to make the journey," said Minister of Tourism Dr Mamdouh El-Beltagi.

EgyptAir's flights to and from Sydney take seven-and-a-half hours — the fastest route possible — with only one stopover

in Singapore, explained Fahim Rayyan, board chairman of EgyptAir.

The road show, which cost US\$70,000, is part of the Ministry of Tourism's efforts to boost marketing. "The tourism crisis in 1993 prompted us to adopt a new strategy for marketing Egypt and drew our attention to the negative results of restricting ourselves to certain markets. We also decided that we should not only depend on the international media to promote Egypt; the road shows which mix business, culture and entertainment are the best promotion for Egypt," said El-Beltagi.

When I was the head of the ETA, I started to promote the New Valley. In 1986, I chose the oases as part of the Pharaoh's Rally route, held annually in the Egyptian desert. This area was well publicized since rally participants are always accompanied by foreign TV stations, magazines and sports writers. The oases themselves have many attractions: Pharaonic sites, Roman storage areas which used to contain wheat and wine and hot water springs.

## Covering tracks

From Egypt's takeover of Sinai to the Pharaoh's Rally, Mohamed Nassim, former head of the Egyptian Tourist Authority (ETA) and head of the Association of Investors for South Sinai, tells of how tourism history was made

Today, tourism is a prime concern of the government, both as an economic and political weapon. This is the first time in the history of marketing Egypt that \$42m has been allocated to tourism. This has enabled us to attract many international conferences — a direct result of the contracts between the Ministry of Tourism and different markets.

The picture has not always been as positive. Back in the 1980s when I was the head of the ETA, tourism was not a number one issue and the budget was extremely modest. We held some "tourist weeks" and participated in international conferences abroad, but we maintained Egypt's image rather than promoted it. In the past, people were not encouraged to invest in tourist projects, especially in remote areas. Now, the situation is completely different, the Ministry of Tourism is flooded with applications and they are in a position to be selective. In Sinai, for example, the entire coastal expanse along the Gulf of Aqaba, from Tabu to Nuweiba, has been allocated for development.

Just as there used to be many problems facing investors, such as the lack of proper laws and legislation to facilitate development and utilities such as water and electricity, the Supreme Council of Tourism (SCT) is now facilitating matters for investors. They are giving them tax exemptions and licences, for encouragement. The initiative from the private sector has enabled the establishment of the first sewage water pipeline in Sharm El-Sheikh, with a capacity of 6,000 cubic metres. This has enabled the launching of no fewer than 17 new tourist projects.

The government has now opened the door for investors to build airports, roads and utilities which will further encourage development. One of the other problems of the past was the lack of electric power. Hydro-electric power lines have been established as far as Nakhl, in central northern Sinai, and will soon extend as far as Tabu, and subsequently southwards along the coast as far as Sharm El-Sheikh, around the tip of Sinai to El-Tur, on the Gulf of Suez. This is expected to be operational before 1997 and it means more development in southern Sinai.

I believe that the next phase will see the area becoming a more fashionable, more sought-after, tourist destination. Also, we should not overlook the rest of the Red Sea. There is enormous potential along the Egyptian shore from Hurgada to Safage and southward to Marsa Alam, Quseir and Halayeb. This can open up for investors.

The Sinai Company for Hotels and Diving Centres was one of the first companies that took over after the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai. At first, there were only modest establishments and we took them over in an atmosphere of adverse media coverage. Israel had circulated brochures at international conferences encouraging people to come and visit Sinai quickly, before it was taken over by Egyptians. We had to meet this challenge and offer them more.

Since Israel knew that they were going to hand over the establishments in Sinai, they carried out no maintenance. So when we took over, the facilities — from air-conditioning to kitchens — were in poor condition. We made a concerted effort to overcome these problems as quickly as possible in order to continue encouraging tourists.

Slowly, we started to renovate existing establishments, and only after two years did the company start to regain profits, improve accommodations and attract more tourists, which allowed for further investments, especially in Sharm El-Sheikh, Dahab and Nuweiba.

Tourists visiting Sinai in the early 1980s largely included Israelis, some Europeans and a few Egyptians. Now, the number of tourists has increased along with the growing number of hotels and tourist facilities. We now have large numbers of Italians, Spaniards, Germans, Swiss and some Israeli tourists.

When I was the head of the ETA, I started to promote the New Valley. In 1986, I chose the oases as part of the Pharaoh's Rally route, held annually in the Egyptian desert. This area was well publicized since rally participants are always accompanied by foreign TV stations, magazines and sports writers. The oases themselves have many attractions: Pharaonic sites, Roman storage areas which used to contain wheat and wine and hot water springs.

A project that can be described as revolutionary is the establishment of the railway line, not parallel with the Nile as is customary in Egypt, but from the oases to the Red Sea. It will operate in October and will make the Western Desert accessible. Another important project involves extending the Nile waters to the oases. This will encourage youth to go there and invest in tourist projects or in agriculture.

Based on an interview with Rehab Saad

## How to get there

### Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet  
Super Jet stations are located in Almazra (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramses Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurgada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria  
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almazra and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.

A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almazra at 7.15pm. Tickets from Almazra LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Port Said  
Services every half hour from 6am to 8pm; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almazra, then Ramses Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said  
Service 6.45am, from Ramses Square in Alexandria, to Port Said. Tickets LE3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurgada  
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almazra. Departs Hurgada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurgada  
Service 8am, from Ramses Square, Alexandria, to Hurgada. Tickets LE3.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh  
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almazra. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company  
Buses travel to North Sinai, South Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qalbi (near Ramses Square), Almazra and Tahrir Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia  
Service every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qalbi, then Almazra and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE35, LE35, one way.

Cairo-Suez  
Service every half hour from 6am to 6pm, from Qalbi, then Almazra and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE35, LE35, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish  
Service every hour from 7.30am to 6pm, from Qalbi, then Almazra and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE35, LE35, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh  
Service every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm, from Abbassiya, then Almazra. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba  
Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almazra. Tickets LE35, one way.

West Delta Bus  
Stations at Tahrir and Almazra. Tel. 243-1646.

Cairo-Hurgada  
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safage  
Service 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Quseir  
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Awan  
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Awan  
Service 3pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3535.

Cairo-Luxor-Awan  
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers. Services to Luxor and Awan 7.40am and 9pm (morning Luxor 6.40 am and 8pm, Awan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians; to Awan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.

"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers. Services to Luxor and Awan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE53; to Awan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria  
"Tribune" trains. VIP train. Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal. Standard trains: Service 9am, 11am, noon, 3pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.

"French" trains. VIP train. Service 8am. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said  
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir  
There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir. Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 759-9066.

Cairo-Awan  
Service 8am, 10am and 12pm. Tickets LE190 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor  
Tickets LE200 for Egyptians, LE270 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurgada  
LE35 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh  
Tickets LE246 for Egyptians, LE821 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Sunny summer deals  
Hotels  
Here's a look at the special rates most hotels, especially resorts, are offering to Egyptians and foreign residents.

Hurgada  
Helwan Regina Hurgada. LE120 per person in a double room including breakfast, dinner, buffet and taxes. Valid until the end of the summer season.

Sharm El-Sheikh  
Sharm El-Sheikh Marriott. LE240 for a single or double room including buffet breakfast, service charge and taxes. Valid until the end of July.

Sharm El-Sheikh  
Sharm El-Sheikh Movenpick Hotel. LE200 for a single and LE250 for a double room in the front by the swimming pool. The hotel offers prices of LE100 for a single and LE200 for a double room in the back or sports area. Prices include buffet breakfast, service charge and taxes. Valid until the end of July.

Travel agencies  
Travel agencies are offering various packages both inside and outside Egypt this summer.

Flamingo Tours: A trip to Nice is LE2,900 for 5 days, Nice and London is LE3,900 for 15 days. Paris and Portugal is LE4,250 for 11 days. Athens and Rhodes is LE3,200 for 10 days. Paris and London is LE4,950 for 15 days. Rome, Florence, Venice is LE4,750 for 10 days and Singapore, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Bangkok is \$2,125 for 19 days. Prices for a special cruise around the Mediterranean in deluxe boats start from \$1,302 per 8 days.

Karnak Tours is organizing trips to Marsa Matruh for 4 days in three-star hotels on a half-board basis at prices starting from LE295. The company is also offering trips to Luxor for 8 days at prices starting from LE1,450.

## Don't just dream it up

Egyptians and non-Egyptians alike can now make use of reductions in travel-related services in Egypt and abroad. Perks are granted to holders of the student card issued by the International Student Identity Card (ISIC) Association or the "Go 25" card issued by the Federation of International Youth Travel Organisations (FIYO). Both organisations are endorsed and supported by UNESCO.

"Although the ISIC was first established in 1945, its services have not yet been exploited by most students in Egypt," said Hazem Nashat, a volunteer in the organisation's Egypt branch.

Although it is endorsed as a "student card", post-graduate students can make use of it if they are enrolled in a full-time language or science course. The card grants them a 50 per cent discount on entrance fees to museums and archaeological sites, and on transportation by road, rail and air. "We are trying to expand the scope of services covered by the card," said Nashat.

Egyptian students travelling abroad now have access to a wide array of services with remarkable offers. Among them are discounts on accommodations, transportation, theatres, shops, sports facilities and parks worldwide. "Some of the services are even offered free of charge, such as entrance to some museums in the United States," said Nashat.

Full details on the countries, hotel chains, restaurants and other services, with phone numbers and reduction listings, are available in a comprehensive guidebook known as the ISIC Issuing Office Manual. "Some hotels and restaurants in the United States, for example, offer as much as a 35 per cent reduction," said Nashat, adding that the office provides student travellers with full information about their destination.

Foreign students in Egypt also benefit from the ISIC. Access to the Nefertari Tomb, for example, can cost LE50 instead of LE100. Most international airlines, including EgyptAir, provide LE100 to LE400 discounts, depending on the distance. "The discount is also offered by agents of these airlines abroad," said Nashat.

Budgeting your travels doesn't have to be such a headache, especially if you're under 26 or still a student. You can pick up one of two ID cards that make it all possible, writes Sherine Nasr

Peter Whately, a 33-year-old British economics student on a two-week visit to Egypt, said that it would have been very difficult to do without the card. "I have a limited budget of £200. Without the card, I would have never been able to visit the archaeological sites in Luxor. I also obtained a LE10 discount on my return train ticket to Cairo," he said.

The student card has other purposes as well. It works as an acknowledged identity card for its holder. "When I was in Canada, my passport was held by the travel agency for some reason and I used my student card as an ID," said Nashat.

Access to the "help line" is another advantage. A free of charge emergency international line, it helps the owner of the card contact any place in the world. "The help line is vital if someone gets lost, needs emergency medical treatment or makes a sudden change in travel plans," said Mohammed El-Essawi, another ISIC volunteer. It also provides advice in seven different languages.

The "Go 25" card issued by FIYO offers discounts on activities and services for those under 26 years of age, whether they are traveling or not. "Knowing that young people have limited funds, the FIYO issued the card to enable them to get considerable discounts for a large variety of things," said El-Essawi. Over two hundred million cards are issued yearly in almost fifty countries worldwide.

Established in 1975, it only recently started to gain publicity in Egypt. "Before then, Egypt was not even mentioned in the Travel Handbook, the main guide for holders of this card," said El-Essawi. The Travel Handbook includes the countries, the currency used, places that issue the card, discounted services and how to reach different sites.

The FIYO volunteers in Egypt plan to make use of the "Go 25" to promote domestic tourism," said El-Essawi. "Before 1994, discounts were unknown in Egypt. Now they are on the rise." He hopes that as many young Egyptians as possible become

aware of the advantages of the card "to facilitate their travels and increase their purchasing power."

The card also gives a boost to young travellers who come to Egypt. "Young travellers usually travel with limited budgets. Their chances to access archaeological sites and museums would have been minimal without the card. Now, they can combine two places for the same amount of money," said El-Essawi.

Up until two years ago, Egypt had to compete with Eastern Mediterranean countries where the card was well established. But now, with the increasing number of services being offered, Egypt is holding its own ground. "Tunisia, Turkey and Israel were the main competitors," said El-Essawi.

The "Go 25" ensures a 50 per cent discount at archaeological sites and the Pharaonic Village. Five-star hotels, international restaurants, Nile cruises and places of entertainment are offering 15 to 25 per cent discounts, as are some jewellery, leather and clothing shops, bowling and billiard centres, computer and language classes and pharmacies in the main governorates, and in Hurgada and in Sharm El-Sheikh.

"We make regular tours in the governorates to find out what shops are willing to give discounts to the card holders," said El-Essawi. "And they are immediately announced in the Travel Handbook." The ISIC and FIYO bureau in Cairo extends further services to the card holders, free of charge. "Volunteers offer free guided tours to tourists," said El-Essawi.

Monthly meetings are held among the card holders where first-hand information is exchanged on the different countries, facilities and advice on where to stay and what to do.

"The bureau also provides young people with the most up-to-date reduction scheme in Egypt and abroad. It also offers budget advice to travellers once they have a travel plan," said El-Essawi.

Both cards are issued at the ISIC and FIYO bureaus in Cairo, 103 El-Minyal Street. For further information contact 363-8815.

## EGYPT AIR

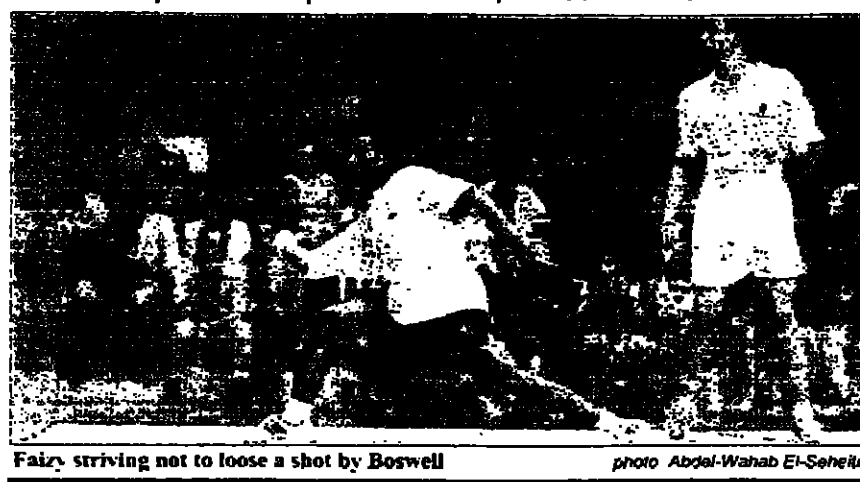
Telephone numbers of EGYPT AIR offices in governorates:

Abu Simbel Sales Office:	324836-324735
Alexandria Offices: Rams:	483357-482878
Gleem:	586541-586543
Airport Office:	4218464-4227808-4282837-4281989
Aswan Office:	315040/1/2/3/4
Airport Office:	498307-498568
Assiut Office:	323151-322711-314000-329407
Mansoura Office:	363978-363733
Hurgada Office:	443591/4
Airport Office:	442883-443597
Ismailia Office:	328357-321958-321951/2-328936
Luxor Office:	385500/1/2/3/4
Airport Office:	38856/7/8
Luxor Office Karnak:	382360
Marsa Matruh Office:	934398
Menoufia Office (Shebin El-Khayma):	233362-233523-233522
New Valley Office:	888981625
Port Said Office:	224129-222780-228921
Port Said Office Karnak:	328833-329970
Sharm El-Sheikh Office:	608314-608409
Airport Office:	600408
Taba Office:	968530018-530011
Direct:	5783620
Tanta Office:	311750/311780
Zakazik Office:	349829-349830/1



# Faizy world champion

Ahmed Faizy won the World Individual Junior Squash Championships on home ground at the Cairo Stadium with one of his most spectacular performances, writes Eman Abdel-Moeti



Faizy striving not to loose a shot by Boswell

photo: Abdel-Wahab El-Shehry

Squash junior Ahmed Faizy fulfilled the hopes of his fans, and the expectations of the tournament organisers who had seeded him number one, when he secured the individual junior world championship title last Friday.

Faizy beat Australia's Stewart Boswell, the number three seed, by three games to one (9-6, 3-9, 9-7, 9-6), in a breathtaking match at Cairo Stadium, cheered on by 1,500 spectators in seating designed for no more than 1,000.

At the start of the match Boswell seemed nervous and dropped the first game, but hearing encouragement from the non-Egyptian fans around the court, his performance picked up in the second. Boswell, who was hoping for revenge on Faizy for beating him in the British Junior Open in January, had clearly studied Faizy's long, low strides and shots well. He managed to use a side-wall shot followed by a straight one deep into the back of the court to catch Faizy out a couple of

times. This trick did not always work, however, as Faizy recovered quickly and took more control of the court. By now it was evident that both players were as good as each other; both fought for every shot and both were determined to keep the serve for themselves for as long as they possibly could. In this game, however, Boswell pulled away from his rival to take the game 9-3.

With the score tied at 1-1, Boswell and Faizy went into their third game, which turned out to be an incredible 30-minute clash of wills and skills. The players tied in points three times: 2-2, then 5-5, then a critical 6-6. Whenever one scored a point, the other fought harder to score the next. This tit for tat scoreline continued until Faizy managed to edge ahead of Boswell, winning the game 9-7.

By the fourth game tension was running high around the court as Egyptian fans began to scent victory, but knew that the game was not yet won. Feeling the title

slipping through his fingers, Boswell's tension made him determined but not distracted; his shots became stronger and seemed to reflect his frustration. At one stage the players tied at 5-5, but Faizy's concentration deepened and he managed to put Boswell out of the match by a score of 9-4.

"Faizy's physical fitness and experience helped him a great deal, but Boswell is also a very good player," commented junior team coach Ahmed Safwat after the match.

On court, Faizy has gained a reputation as a quiet player, not given to outbursts against umpires or opponents, with a maturity lacking in many senior players. These are all qualities vital to produce professional performances that can be enjoyed by both opponents and spectators. Boswell, too, shows similar qualities which may well enable him to take over the junior crown when Faizy moves to the seniors.

Meanwhile, Karim El-Mistikawe, seeded five-eight, had the surprise victory of the competition when he beat Malaysia's fourth seeded Ong Beng Hee 3-1, to take third place after Boswell. Hee was another strong contender, who had some clever shots but also seemed to be rather out of breath and unfit. After a 79-minute match, Mistikawe managed to put Hee out by the skin of his teeth; the final scoreline stood at 5-9, 9-3, 10-9, 10-9.

Despite the difference in seedings, coach Ahmed Safwat had expected Mistikawe to win, particularly after he beat England's Lee Beatchill, seeded two, 3-2 in the quarterfinals before losing to Boswell in the semifinals.

Egypt's third team-member Amr Shabana also put on a respectable performance, despite being knocked out of the quarterfinals 3-0 by Boswell. Shabana, 16, made his international debut at the 1995 British Junior Open and Ahmed Safwat predicts that he will take after Ahmed Faizy and become junior world champion one day.

After a day off on Saturday, Egyptian players were again on court on Sunday for the beginning of the team event. Egypt is hopeful of clinching the team trophy for the second time.

## Ali opens Games and hearts

The Centennial Olympic Games was accorded a multi-million dollar welcoming ceremony on Friday. But the show will be remembered for the indomitable spirit of just one man

Presidents, including the US's Bill Clinton who declared the Games open, along with prime ministers, royals and dignitaries from all walks of life witnessed the opening ceremony of the 26th Olympiad, the biggest sporting event ever to be staged on the planet.

A record 10,000 athletes from 197 countries, 27 countries more than were present at the 1992 Games in Barcelona, took part in the ceremony, which was seen by 83,000 people in the Olympic Stadium with millions more watching on television. The nations they represented ranged from the tiny Pacific island of Nauru to the might of the superpower host nation.

Among the new teams taking part were the Palestinians — their black, white, red and green flag held aloft by a member of the team providing a powerful symbol of the aspirations of a people.

And, in what was surely intended as a message to the world, Iran's flag was carried by a woman, the first Iranian woman athlete to take part in the Games since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. In the Barcelona Games in 1992, Iran had caused controversy by refusing to allow the country's name placard to be carried by a woman from the Spanish organising team. This year's flag bearer is competing in the shooting events.

In his opening ceremony speech, Juan Antonio Samaranch, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) president, called on the world to declare an "Olympic truce" during the Games and pledged IOC funds for the reconstruction of sports facilities in Bosnia. "We urge all parties involved in armed conflict to observe the Olympic truce and to lay down their arms so that dialogue may be restored as a prelude to peace," he said.

Earlier, in a blaze of light, colour and music, the 26th Games witnessed a showy spectacular of entertainment in which 5,500 people performed. Gladys Knight (minus the Pips) sang "Georgia on my Mind", opera diva Jessye Norman performed and the words of Atlanta's most distinguished son, Martin Luther King, rang out across the stadium. The show was said to have cost 35 million dollars.

But, for all the dollars and glamour and glitz, the ceremony belonged to just one man. When boxing legend and 1960 Olympic gold medalist Muhammad Ali, his body trembling and debilitated from Parkinson's Disease — incapacitated but not subdued — took the Olympic torch for the final walk towards where the flame would be lit, whose heart did not miss a beat out of awe and respect for this great athlete, fighter and man?

## A week of disappointment

Things are looking grim for Egyptian athletes in Atlanta, with attendant dismay for officials, fans and journalists, reports Essam Abdel-Moneim from Atlanta

We were not really expecting instant glory and gold medals. But after two years of serious preparations and millions of pounds spent on training the 29 selected athletes, we were expecting something. And so far, nothing has been delivered.

Here in Atlanta, we had high hopes for Egypt's favourite daughter, 18-year-old swimmer Rania Elwany. The whole delegation went along to the Georgia Tech Aquatic Center to support the African and Arab champion in both the 100 and 200 metres races.

But despite the claims of sports officials in Cairo that Elwany was a contender for a medal, the swimmer, who trains in the USA under the supervision of an American coach while studying at the University of Alabama, not only failed to qualify for the B class race — the playoffs for 9th to 16th place, but failed to equal her own Egyptian records. She came 19th in the 100 metres; in the 200 metres, she was 24th out of 48. Teammate Tamer Zehoum failed in the 100 metres freestyle and came in last. Both swimmers have still to compete in the 50 metres freestyle today and tomorrow.

The second disappointment of the first day was the elimination of judo champions Heba Rashid in the women's over 72kg, and Basil El-Gharabawi in the men's over 95kg category. All of Rashid's 150 kilograms were not enough to get her beyond the quarterfinals, having won one match, she was defeated in two. El-Gharabawi, meanwhile, was eliminated in the first round.

The wrestlers and boxers, all eliminated from the first rounds, also said an early goodbye to the Games. There are still some Egyptian athletes left to compete in shooting and weight-lifting, but officials are not optimistic about their chances.

Egypt's remaining hopes are the handball team, and rower Ali Ibrahim, who managed to reach the semifinals of the skiff event, held yesterday.

The handball team started competition yesterday, playing its first match against Algeria in group B, which also includes teams from Brazil, France, Germany, and Spain. Morale on the team, which is ranked sixth in the world, is running high. They know they carry the weight of national hopes and expectations on their shoulders, especially following the other athletes' disappointing performances, but they seem strong enough to bear their burden, and remain cheerful and positive.

Away from the Egyptian delegation's woes, the Games themselves are running into operational problems. Complaints have been flooding in — from athletes, visitors, journalists and officials — over transport problems within the city, and the computer-processing of results and other data. In short, the first two days have been chaos. A hassled Bob Brennan, press chief of the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games, told reporters, with perhaps a little desperation in his voice, that "things should get better".



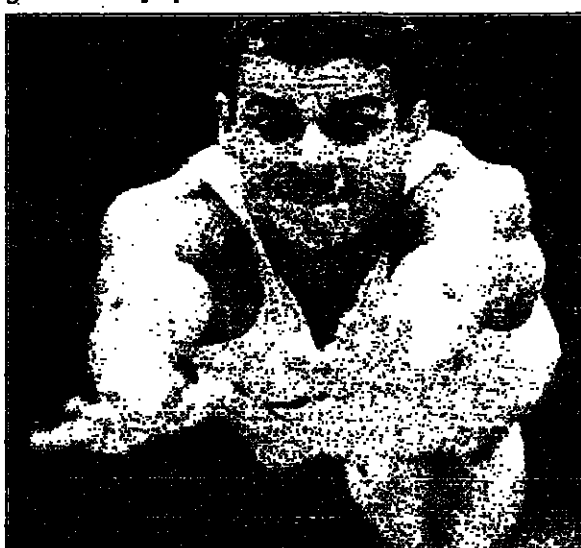
Tom Dolan of the US gold medalist of the 400m individual medley (photos: AP, Reuters and AFP)



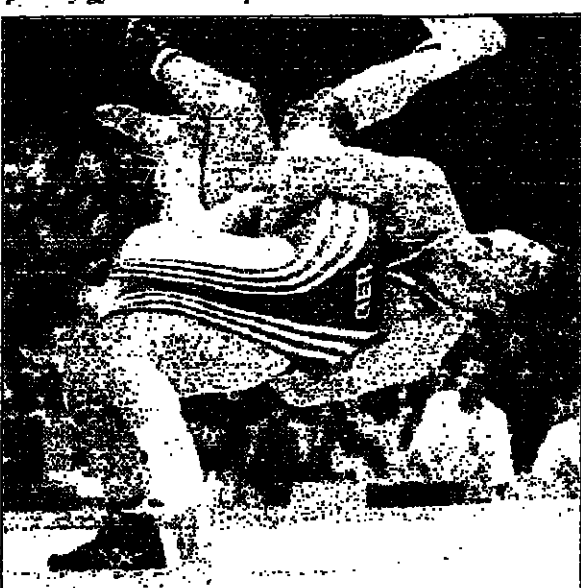
Mohamed Ali, 1960 gold medalist, lights the flame



Poland's Renata Mauer shoots her air rifle to win the first gold in the Olympics



France's Eric Poujade vaults during the men's compulsory gymnastics competition



Hamza Yertlikaya from Turkey lifts Germany's Thomas Zander in the 89kg Greco-Roman Wrestling to win the gold



Australia's Ruth Moriz performs on the balance beam of the women's team compulsory gymnastics

## On the sidelines

### IOC warning

THE INTERNATIONAL Olympic Committee (IOC) has warned the Atlanta organisers to improve the transport and computer systems at the Centennial Games or risk humiliation. Emergency meetings of IOC officials, organisers and sponsors were held as transport and technological failures worsened, sparking angry complaints from competitors, the media and the public. Journalists and competitors told horror stories about trying to get to the sporting venues.

### Trapped!

US DREAM Team basketball players say the small hotel rooms and tight security in Atlanta are making them feel more like prisoners trapped in a beautiful prison than the hottest Olympic attraction.

### Gold reward

A FILIPINO senator, Ernesto Herrera, has proposed a law giving life-time allowances and other rewards to any Filipino athlete who brings the nation its first Olympic gold medal. As well as a monthly allowance of 5000 pesos (\$192) for life and a collateral-free loan of one million pesos (\$38,500), the athlete would have priority in acquiring government land.

### Baywatch in Atlanta

BAYWATCH star David Hasselhoff cheered for US boxers from a front row seat at the Olympic boxing arena. After being introduced by a ring announcer between fights, Hasselhoff stood and acknowledged the crowd by taking off his cap and yelling "USA...USA".

### Hockey champs defeated

REIGNING champions Germany and Spain were both defeated in the opening games of the Olympic hockey tournament last Saturday. Germany's men lost 0-1 against Spain and Spain's women crashed 0-4 to world champions Australia.

### First gold medal

POLISH marksman Renata Mauer won the first gold medal of the Atlanta Olympics. Mauer overcame a seemingly insurmountable lead by Germany's Petra Homeber to win the women's 10-metre air rifle event on the final shot. She finished with 497.6 points, two tenths of a point ahead of Homeber at the Wolf Creek Shooting Complex. Aleksandra Ivosev of Yugoslavia took the bronze with 497.2.

### New world records

BELGIAN Fredrick Deburghgraeve and South African Penny Heyns have set new world records in the swimming events. Deburghgraeve, who won Belgium's first-ever Olympic swimming title with a tough victory in the men's 100m breaststroke final, broke the old record in the morning heats, swimming in a record time of 1:00:60 (one minute and 0.60 seconds).

Penny Heyns set a new world record of 1 min 07.02sec in the women's 100m breaststroke heats. She went on to win South Africa's first gold medal since 1952 in the final of the same event.

TURKEY'S tiny weight-lifting titan Halil Mutlu eclipsed his own world snatch record on his way to winning the flyweight title. The minuscule lifter, only 1.52 metres tall, smiled with bar still aloft as he improved the snatch record in the 54 kg class by 2.5 kg to 162.5 kg on his way to a two-lift aggregate of 287.5 kg. His performance came just six days after his 23rd birthday.

### First Irish gold

MICHELLE Smith presented Ireland with its first Olympic swimming title, dethroning defending champion Krisztina Egerszegi in an enthralling women's 400m individual medley final. Smith, added another gold when she won the 400 metres freestyle race.

### Help from above

RUSSIAN soldier Olga Klocheva asked for divine inspiration to help her depose compatriot Marina Logvinenko and win the women's 10 metre air pistol gold with an Olympic record score of 490.1 points.

### Diamond gold

MICHAEL Diamond won Australia's first ever Olympic shooting gold medal in the men's trap event and said he hoped reaction to the Port Arthur massacre would not mean the sport was excluded from the 2000 Games in his native Sydney.

### Old gold

JEANNIE Longo, the greatest women's cyclist of all time, crowned her controversial career by finally winning an Olympic gold medal at the age of 37. The Frenchwoman won the women's road racing title in a time of 2 hours, 36 minutes 13 seconds.

### Dedications

AMERICA'S Greco-Roman wrestler, Dennis Hall, who won second place in the bantamweight event, dedicated his silver medal to combating the problem of drunk-driving. His brother was killed in an accident involving a drunk driver. Angel Martino, the swimmer who finished third in the 100-metres freestyle, turned her medal over to Trisha Henry, a 20-year-old cancer victim who works among the volunteers at the Games.

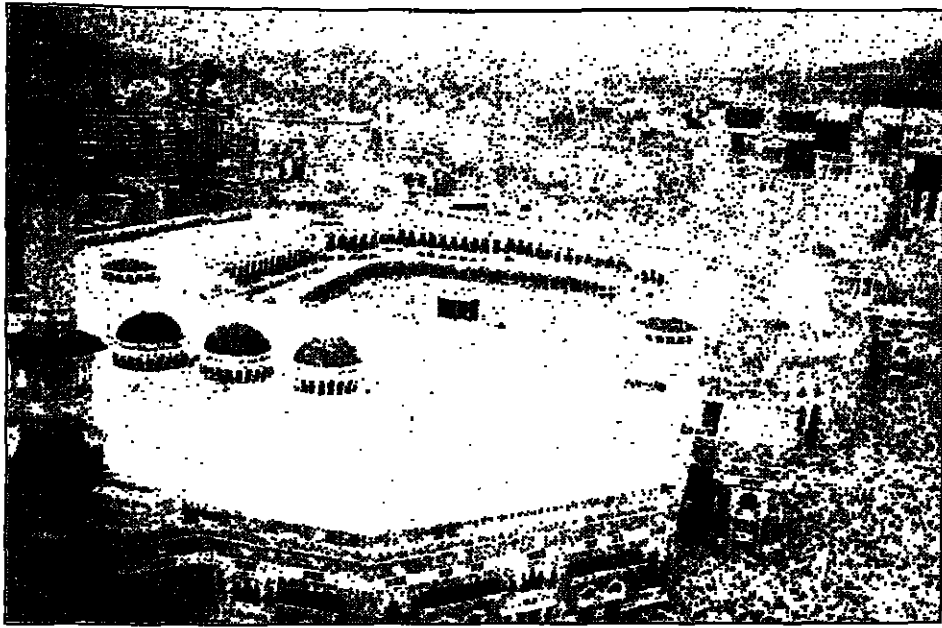
### Russia on top

RUSSIA has maintained the dominance previously held by the Soviet Union in Olympic gymnastics, winning the men's team gold over China and fellow former Soviet Republics Ukraine and Belarus.

compiled from AP and AFP

Edited by Inas Mazhar





## Kamal Ismail: Making monuments

For sixty years he has worked behind the scenes. He built the Mugammah, the imposing symbol of Egyptian bureaucracy standing in the heart of Cairo. Now he has turned his mind to Mecca, and Medina



Photo: Sharm Sakha

He is in his office before ten. There is little on the premises to show that sixty years have passed since he first started work here, in 1936.

The classical furniture, the walls and the old oak desk reveal none of the tell-tale signs of time. Apparently renovation is recent. For a man of 89, or even for a man 20 years younger, he is intellectually keen and physically upright. He goes to the office every morning, despite the downtown traffic. Following an established routine is important.

He receives an overseas call about a project he is currently working on. He is very careful about what he says. Serious, but never too stern, with the suggestion of a smile in his eyes — their softness, perhaps, the one revelation of age.

He is currently supervising the final touches on the monumental project he was commissioned to plan and execute, as engineering consultant, 13 years ago by the Saudi government: renovating and extending the sanctuaries of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina and the Ka'ba and Mosque of Mecca. The project in the Prophet's Mosque in Medina entailed extending the existing prayer area to 95,000 covered square metres, and adding 250,000 square metres of prayer areas. Under this have been constructed a parking lot with room for 5,000 cars as well as sanitary facilities.

In Mecca, the area around the Ka'ba was extended by 19,000 square metres, comprising three storeys and open spaces, and an open area about 75,000 square metres in area was created. Underground parking spaces and tents have also been built.

In the Prophet's sanctuary, Ismail, cooperating with a specialised German company, made innovative use of computer-designed, hydraulically

controlled umbrellas and sliding domes to protect worshippers from the sun and retain heat in the Mosque during winter.

He considers this his most important project, his life work. But Ismail has left his imprint on landmark works over the past sixty years, from the grand architectural sweeps of the 1930s and '40s to the industrial complexes of the '60s. A meticulous administrator who thrives on teamwork, he is always involved in the minutiae of planning and execution.

Kamal Ismail was born in Mit Ghamr, Daqahliya, in 1908. His father, the *umda* or village head, wanted him to study medicine; but Ismail was "smitten by architecture, even as a very little boy. I'd walk past a building and envy its architect, and imagine how he must feel, seeing his building go up, like a father watching his son grow."

He entered the Architecture Department of the Royal School of Engineering (*Madrasat Al-Handasa Al-Malakiya*), graduating in 1927. He travelled to France, and studied at the Ecole Nationale Speciale des Beaux Arts, a school which gave America and Europe its major architects. He obtained his doctorate in architectural sciences in 1934.

He started his career at the Maslaha Al-Mabani Al-Amiriya, the administration responsible for all government buildings, considered Egypt's major architectural school in the 1930s and 1940s, and became its director in 1949. In 1953, only three years after he had been appointed director-general, the Maslaha was closed down — the demise of one of Egypt's great architectural schools. It undertook landmark works, like the Egyptian University, Parliament, the Mixed Courts (now the High Court) buildings and the telephone company. The master

architects, like Ali Hassan and Mustafa Fahmi, executed these works. There was a department in every province responsible for repairs and renovation. If a window was broken, it would be repaired the next day. The principle of maintenance is very important; there must always be a budget set aside for maintenance. The rigour with which he was trained seems a thing of the past, however, and — understandably perhaps — he is somewhat *ancien regime* in his disapproval of today's standards of education. His reservations regarding the education of architects today are subtly expressed, but strong nonetheless.

In the mid-'40s Ismail was commissioned by Osman Pasha Muharram, then Minister of Works, to create Alexandria University's Faculty of Architecture, the now famous building facing Kotsika by the sea.

"Muharram was a great architect and a man with vision and courage. He did not care if he was criticised. He spoke to me of a building in ancient style, to fit modern usage, and I felt that Alexandria was the best place to apply the idea, because it was an open city, receptive to new ideas." The building, with its grandiose columns, was inspired by the lines of Pharaonic architecture.

The monumental lines familiar to Ismail were used again in 1951, but adapted to the Mugammah complex which dominates Cairo's Tahrir Square.

After 1953, the Maslaha now a thing of the past, Ismail had to adapt to new circumstances. He was no longer building grandiose buildings, but he began work as a consultant for works undertaken by the Mabahret Mohamed Ali (Mohamed Ali Hospital) Welfare Society.

He was commissioned by the government to build large-scale industrial projects: chemical and mil-

itary plants, as well as the famous Abu Qir industrial complex, which entailed overall industrial planning, with housing, a hospital and a railway station.

He is, one feels, the counterpart to the Hassan Fathi of *Architecture for the Poor*. Equally concerned with aesthetics and the use of culturally harmonious lines, his taste runs more to the relatively massive qualities of the Pharaonic and Greek temple than to domes, arches and stucco work. He entertains strong views — expressed as early as 1954 — on the "problems of abnormal population growth in Egypt".

There has been no dearth of recognition, yet he feels a message has remained unfulfilled. "I never missed an opportunity, during the past fifty years, to try to design works in line with inherited styles — whether Pharaonic or Arabic — yet in harmony with the spirit of the times. The aim is to give character to architecture. But people went on building blocks and putting openings in them for windows. In Cairo for instance, unlike many major cities, there is no collective architectural personality. It is as though every architect was referring to a different magazine."

About two years ago, Ismail sent a letter to *Al-Ahram*. One is reminded, reading it, of his comment regarding the architect's progeny: pride, and a touch of indignation at others' failure to recognise beauty.

"Wooden kiosks had been built as an extension on top of the Mugammah building, and I commented on how this distorted what is a very important facade for the (Tahrir) square. The building had been whitewashed, although it is made of artificial stone, and so it lost its features. They later removed the whitewash, but not the ugly kiosks."

He does not stop at regrets, though. He almost skims over the past, more concerned with balancing

out his activities and summoning his energy for the work at hand.

In the evenings, at home, it is important for him to keep in touch, not to become intellectually isolated. "I watch television. The news is important, it keeps one in contact with the present."

He reads "books not related to architecture, as much as possible. It is important to change one's state of mind."

But his work requires constant perusal of developments in architecture, and sometimes science and the environment. "The first lesson we learned in architecture is that it is a mixture of science and art, not simply the cosmetic aspect of a building. One must be like a surgeon, to know all the materials used over the past centuries, and how to adapt them to circumstances, things we live with, like earthquakes, traffic, the need for sanitation, air conditioning, proper acoustics..."

He spends most of his afternoons at home, limiting his social life to a weekly luncheon and the occasional Friday gathering at the club.

He is probably unable, by now, to relinquish the discipline which has directed him practically all of his life, but he is aware of change — "let us not say old age... but of advanced age, of rules not so strictly kept as when one was younger."

But he goes on. With his work in Mecca and Medina done, he has completed the most important project of his life, in which aesthetics and science, ancient architecture and modern technology, were married.

He says it is his last project, but he cannot countenance life without his work. He will, no doubt, soon embark on a new endeavour.

Profile by Aziza Sami

## Package of Cards

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◆ Goodbye and farewell to my good friend, the *Weekly's* No. 1 fan and head of the EC delegation in Egypt, Michael McGeever. Press Attaché of the Delegation of the European Union Masal Kahlil held a farewell cocktail party for him at the EC delegation's office in Zamalek last week to give all his friends, including the *Weekly's* editor-in-chief Hosny Gulndy, managing editor Hani Shukrallah, myself and colleague Gamal Nkrumah, as well as *Al-Ahram* colleagues Alaa Ezz and Maher El-Dahabi a chance to tell him just how much we'll miss him and to wish him all the best — as well as indulge in good food and drink and socialise the afternoon away, of course.

◆ When I heard that my good friend, head of the Women Writers Association, Latifa El-Zayyat, had recently been granted the State Merit Award, I knew that this was one opportunity her friends were not going to let go by unnoticed. And sure enough, a few days ago, I received an invitation from the members of the association, which the late Amira El-Said once headed, to a celebration tea at the Cairo Library in Zamalek where I was joined by Latifa's colleagues and friends, writers and journalists, including prominent columnist, author, and library director Kamel Zobeiri.

◆ The One Thousand and One Nights ballroom at the Nile Hilton last week saw one thousand and one stars lighting up a very special wedding. At the centre of attention were the son and daughter of life-long friends of mine: Abeer, daughter of Hassan El-Sha'ir, assistant to the editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram*, and Gamal Abdel-Fattah, appeals lawyer, and Hisham, son of plastic artist and artistic consultant for

*Al-Ahbar* Mounir Kana'an, and the wonderful Sanna' El-Biesi, editor-in-chief of the much acclaimed *Nisf El-Dunya* magazine. And starchy, starchy night that it was, it was only fitting that the guest list consisted of celestial bodies galore. To mention them all would require an entire supplement, but with one already included in this week's issue, suffice it to say that the ballroom literally

sparkled with the presence of journalists, media representatives, ministers, authors and artists — a veritable cocktail of names and faces. What a merry time we all had. Definitely made all the merrier, of course, with the fabulous performances by singers Mohamed Tharwat and Mostafa Attar, and everybody's favourite dancer, Fifi Abdo. With such a mar-

vellous turnout, the party was such a success that the stars did what they did best, and shone on until the early hours of the morning.

◆ Whenever I need to make an overseas phone call — and being a woman who has friends all over the world, I often do — there is only one place I ever think of making it from. I have always loved the efficiency and friendliness of the staff at the Almaz telephone exchange, and so it came as no surprise at all when I heard that vice-president of the Telephone and Telecommunications Organisation, Abdel-Fattah Abu Serle, had recently awarded the Almaz branch for being having the cleanest and nicest looking building. The manager and employees were all given cash awards, and my good friend, general manager of the Almaz, Kobba and Sheraton districts, Mahmoud Metwalli, was given a special award for being the best and most helpful area manager.

◆ I was dining in the Cairo Sheraton's La Mamma restaurant the other day when I heard music that sounded quite familiar. Now the only other time I had heard music like that was when I was in Italy last year, and so for a while, of course, because after asking around I discovered that the performing trio, consisting of a singer, violinist and guitarist, had been flown over from Napoli by the hotel to give the restaurant's guests a real taste of Italy. Personally, I would have thought the food was supposed to do that, but the idea obviously worked, and for the rest of my meal it really did feel that I was back in Rome — if only for a short, sweet time.

هكذا من الأصل